The Super NES Book

All you need to know about Nintendo's game-changer

A history of Mario • Mode 7 classics • Unmissable RPGs

PAL VERSION
ON
OFF
POWER
EJECT
RESET
Nintendo
SUPER NINTENDO™
ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM
POWER

Welcome to

The Super NES Book

Nintendo had its work cut out with the release of its Super NES. While it had dominated the 8-bit generation with its NES, Sega already had a 14-month head start with its own 16-bit console, and a host of arcade exclusives from Sega and many third-party publishers. Nintendo fought back in fine style and while the fight was far closer than the previous generation, the Super NES eventually pulled ahead as both consoles reached the end of their commercial lives. Assisted by its fabled use of Mode 7 and hits such as Super Mario World, Secret Of Mana, Street Fighter 2 and Axelay, Nintendo's machine won over the public and it remains an essential console for any collector, delivering a diverse range of games that few other systems of the time could hope to match. With that in mind we've taken this opportunity to celebrate some of the console's finest games. So take a comfy seat, cast your mind back and bask in the brilliance of the Super NES.

In association with retro GAMER magazine

The Super NES Book

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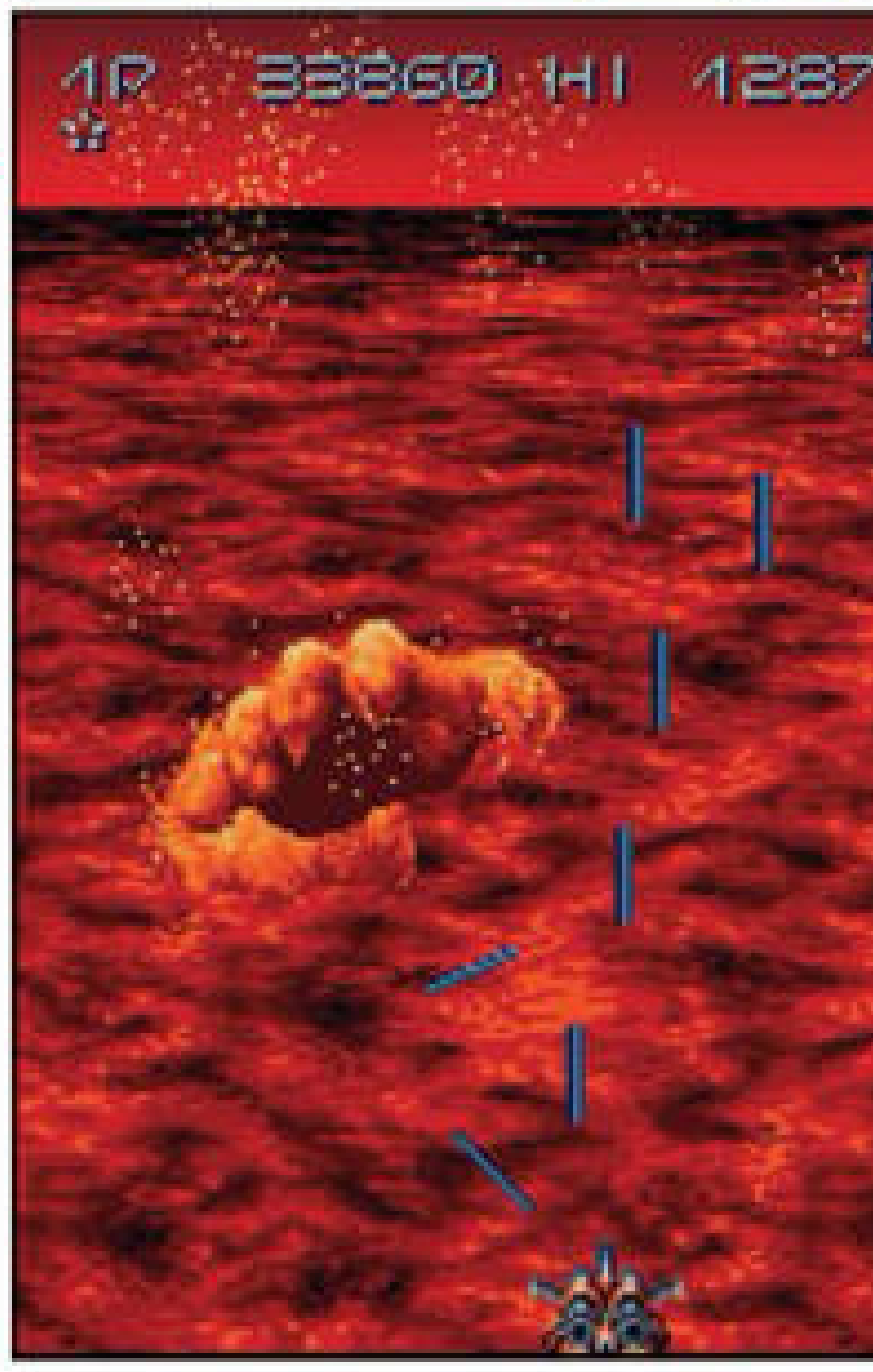

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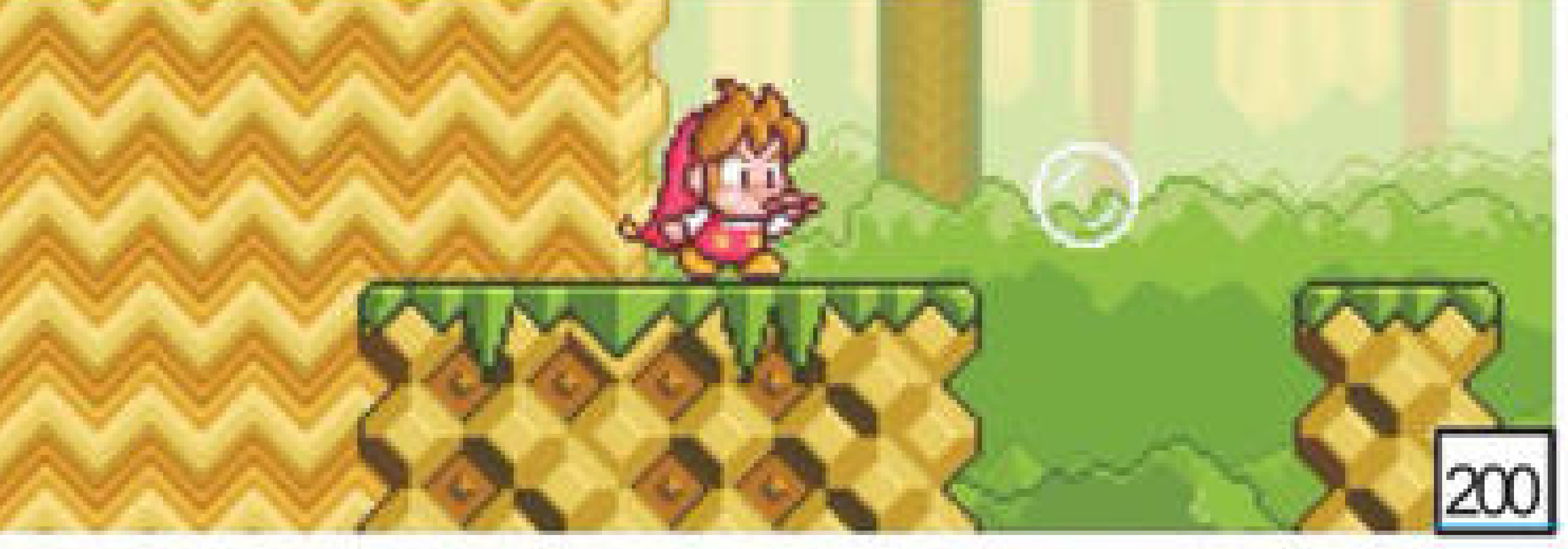

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SUPER NES CONTROL SET
SUPER NINTENDO
CAPCOM
SUPER NINTENDO ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM
SELECT
START
Y
B

Year Released: Japan: 1990 USA: 1991 UK: 1992

Original Price: Japan: 25,000 Yen USA: $199 UK: £149.99 (INCLUDING SUPER MARIO WORLD)

Buy it now for: £25+ ($40+)

Associated Magazines: Nintendo Magazine System, Superplay, Total, N-Force, SNES Force

Why the SNES was great… Nintendo's 16 bit powerhouse represents the true "Golden Age" of videogaming as the likes of Konami, Squaresoft and even Nintendo itself have arguably never been on better form than when designing games for this machine. The best SNES releases featured both flawless gameplay and graphics and set a high benchmark for quality entertainment software that, in many cases, endures to this day.

SNES

BY RELEASING THE SUPER NES A YEAR LATER THAN ITS NEAREST RIVALS, NINTENDO FACED THE DAUNTING TASK OF CONVERTING A GENERATION OF GAMERS TO ITS NEW CONSOLE. IT COULD HAVE GONE HORRIBLY WRONG BUT, AS **RETRO GAMER** REVEALS, ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE IF YOU HAVE THE BEST GAMES

With a NES in thirty per cent of American homes and the word 'Famicom' synonymous with videogames in Japan, Nintendo was understandably reluctant to release a successor to its best selling console and chose to support the ageing 8-bit console for as long as it could. It was, however, only a matter of time before the advance of technology allowed Nintendo's competition to take the lead and by 1988 both NEC's PC Engine and Sega's Mega Drive offered a far more powerful entertainment experience. Nintendo could no longer rest on its laurels and secretly began work on its next 'Family Computer': the Super Famicom.

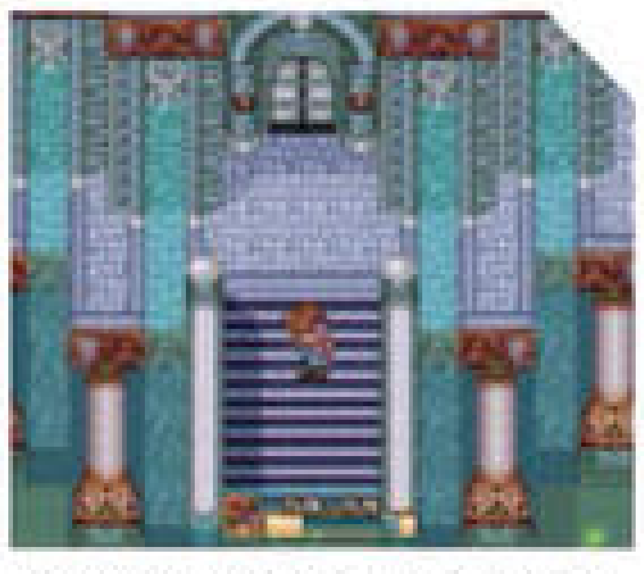
The 16-bit-system had been developed and designed by Masayuki Uemura, who had spent months attempting to make the Super Famicom backwards compatible with Famicom cartridges but had found that the massive leap in technology had set Nintendo's machine so far in advance of its predecessor that building in Famicom compatibility would have been far too costly. Without backwards compatibility to bridge the transition between consoles, Nintendo would need an irresistible launch line-up to tempt existing Famicom owners to upgrade. Knowing this, Nintendo's president, Hiroshi Yamauchi needed his best man on the job and, as soon as development of *Super Mario Bros 3* was complete, he charged Shigeru Miyamoto and his thirty-man team with the task of exploring the new hardware's game-playing capabilities.

One of the biggest tricks that the hardware had up its sleeve was the now infamous Mode 7: a graphical hardware mode that allowed sprites to zoom in and out and rotate in a way that simulated a 3D depth-of-field effect. Neither the Mega Dive nor PC Engine was

To CD or not CD.

Wishing to exploit the advantages of the growing CD-ROM medium, Nintendo had planned a SNES CD-ROM drive from as early as 1988 and had courted both Sony and Phillips with the proposal. The fruits of those early endeavours were a series of Nintendo licensed games for the Phillips CDI and a prototype add-on from Sony that was eventually developed into the PlayStation we know today.

If Nintendo had not backed out of the SNES/PlayStation partnership then the videogame landscape would be unrecognisable and this RetroInspection might tell the tale of a very different console. It is unclear how many games were in development for the SNES-CD but we do know that *Secret Of Mana* was originally CD-based with a planned branching story. The game had to be dramatically cut back to fit on cartridge: a process that was instrumental in convincing Squaresoft to move *Final Fantasy VII* from N64 to PlayStation.



[SNES] *Secret Of Mana* started off as a CD title, complete with branching storylines.

SUPER NINTENDO
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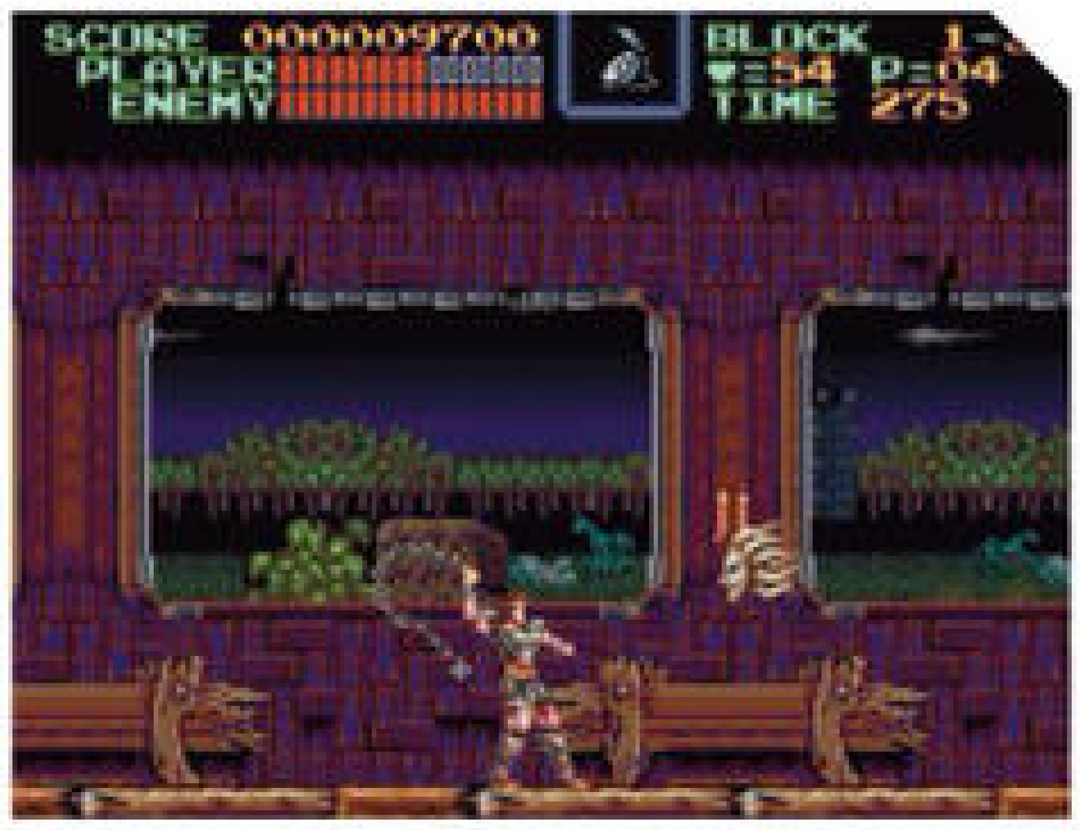
The Japanese packaging evoked a playful image that was missing from the mature design of the console.

The SNES Jr made it to the USA but its rarity makes it much easier to find the Japanese version.

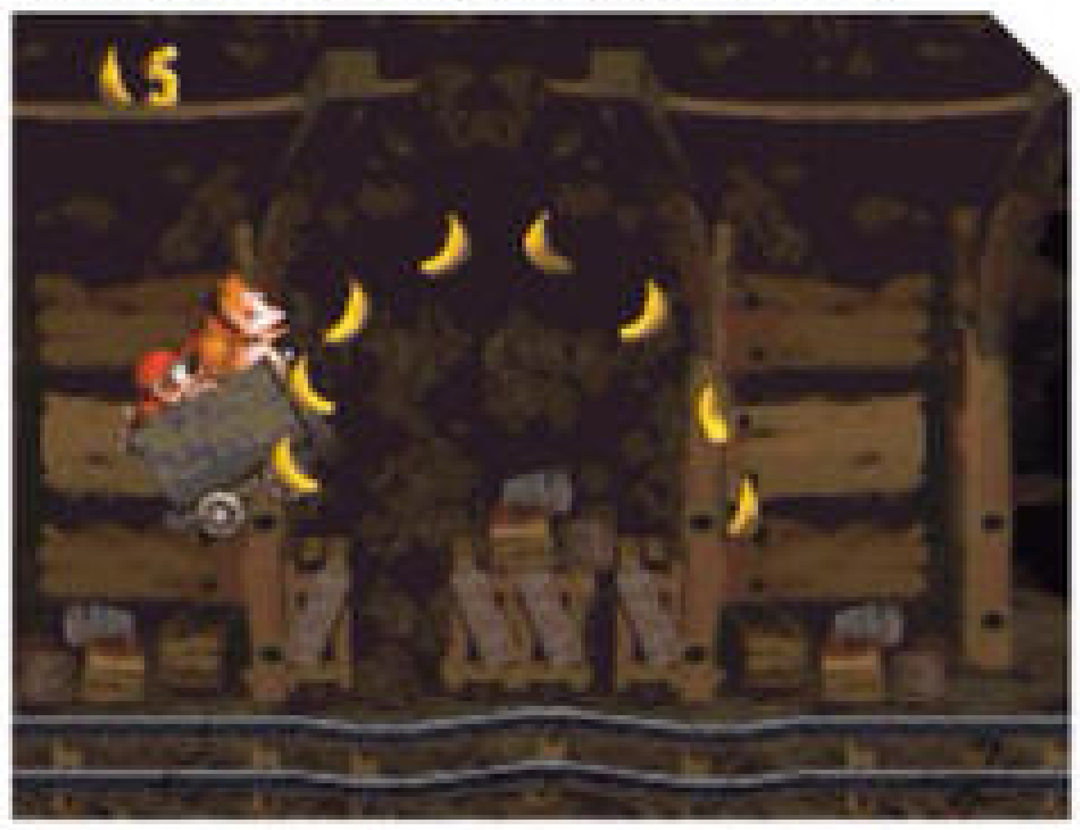
capable of sprite scaling on such a level so Nintendo decided that the first three Super Famicom games would take advantage of the innovative feature. After 15 solid months of R&D, Miyamoto and Co would begin work on *F-Zero*, *Pilotwings* and *Super Mario Bros 4*, which would all use Mode 7 to varying degrees. However, with only ten months until launch day, the team was only able to complete two of the games on time and *Pilotwings* (the most technically demanding of the three) slipped by a month.

By 20 November 1990, Japanese demand for Nintendo's new console had reached fever-pitch and any worries that the machine would fail to entice existing Famicom owners were washed away. Demand for the console was so high that, for example, the Hankyu department store in Osaka had to stop taking preorders only a week after they started. In retrospect the release of the Super Famicom heralded the age of hysteria that has defined every hardware launch to this day. By 20 November, total pre-orders numbered in excess of 1.5 million yet only 300,000 machines shipped. Fearing that several Yakuza groups planned to hijack the Super Famicom shipment, to sell on at artificially inflated prices, Nintendo commenced 'Operation Midnight Shipping' in which the entire batch of 300,000 machines were hauled across Japan in the very early hours of the 20th. Thanks to these dramatic efforts, the launch was a rousing success: the Super Famicom sold out in seconds, even with only two launch titles. Yet when one of those titles was the sequel to the best selling game of all time, success was a certainty. Despite being the least technically demanding of the Super Famicom's launch titles it was *Super Mario Bros 4: Super Mario World* that shifted the machine. *Super Mario World* expanded on its predecessors by offering finely tuned platforming gameplay, beautiful pastel graphics and a staggering 79 levels. The game is still remembered, 16 years on, as the best 2D platform game of all time so it is no surprise that Nintendo relied on it to push sales of their console.

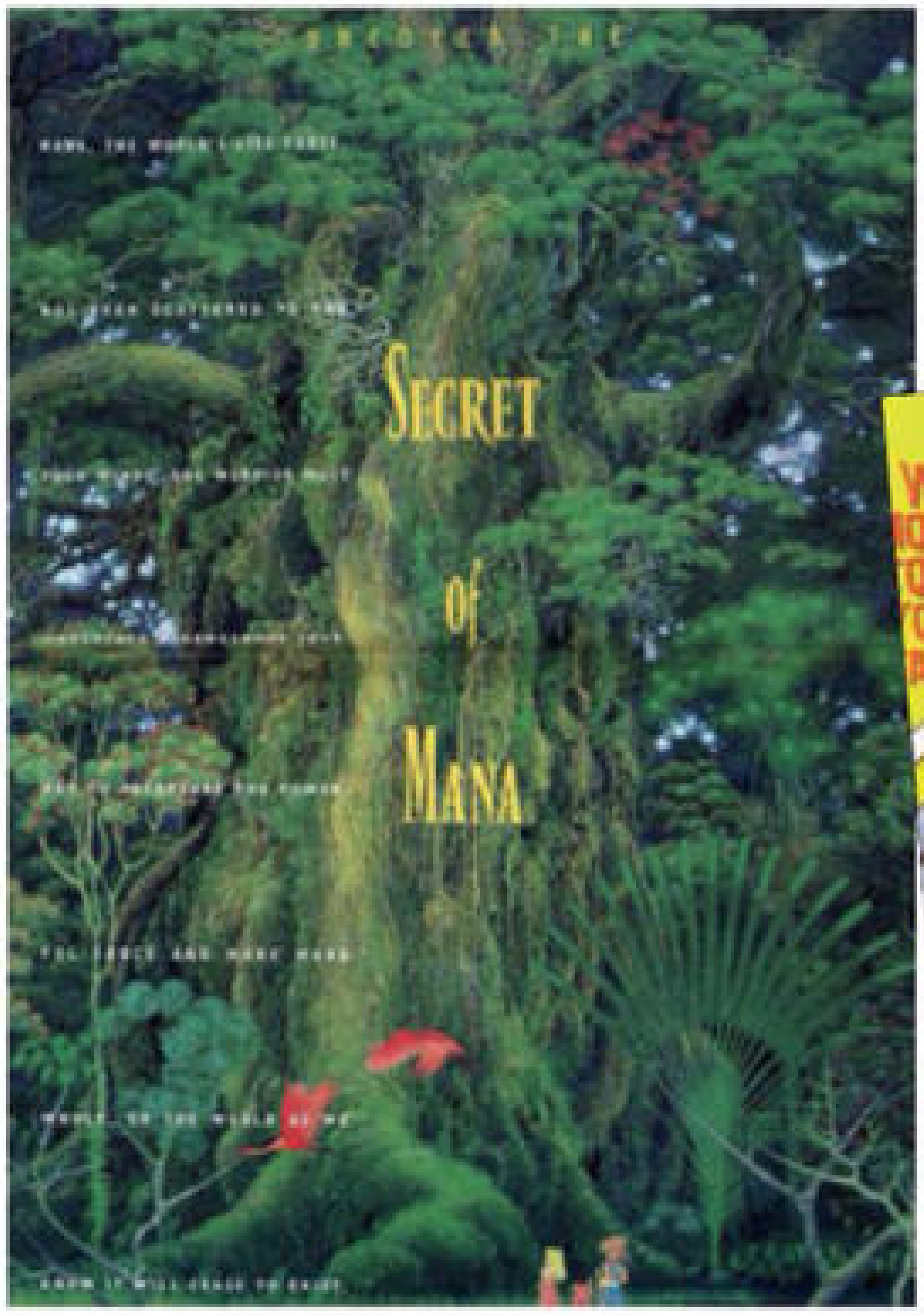
When it came time to introduce the renamed Super Nintendo Entertainment System to the UK (a typical 17 months after the Japanese release) Nintendo made the bold decision to bundle *Super Mario World* with every SNES console. Making for one of the best freebies of all time, *Mario* helped to move many a SNES into British living rooms that summer, but arriving two years after the Mega Drive proved very costly. Sega's black beauty was phenomenally popular in Europe (thanks to its exclusive sports simulations and arcade conversions) and left little room for competition. It wasn't until Christmas of 1992 that the tide truly began to turn, thanks to Capcom's *Street Fighter II*. The original arcade game had spawned a worldwide craze, the likes of which had not been seen since the days of *Pac-Man* and *Space Invaders*, and whichever home console netted a conversion first would benefit from a serious rise in sales. Sure enough, Nintendo managed to snag Capcom's seminal brawler a full year before Sega and stole a significant slice of the UK market in the process. A pattern



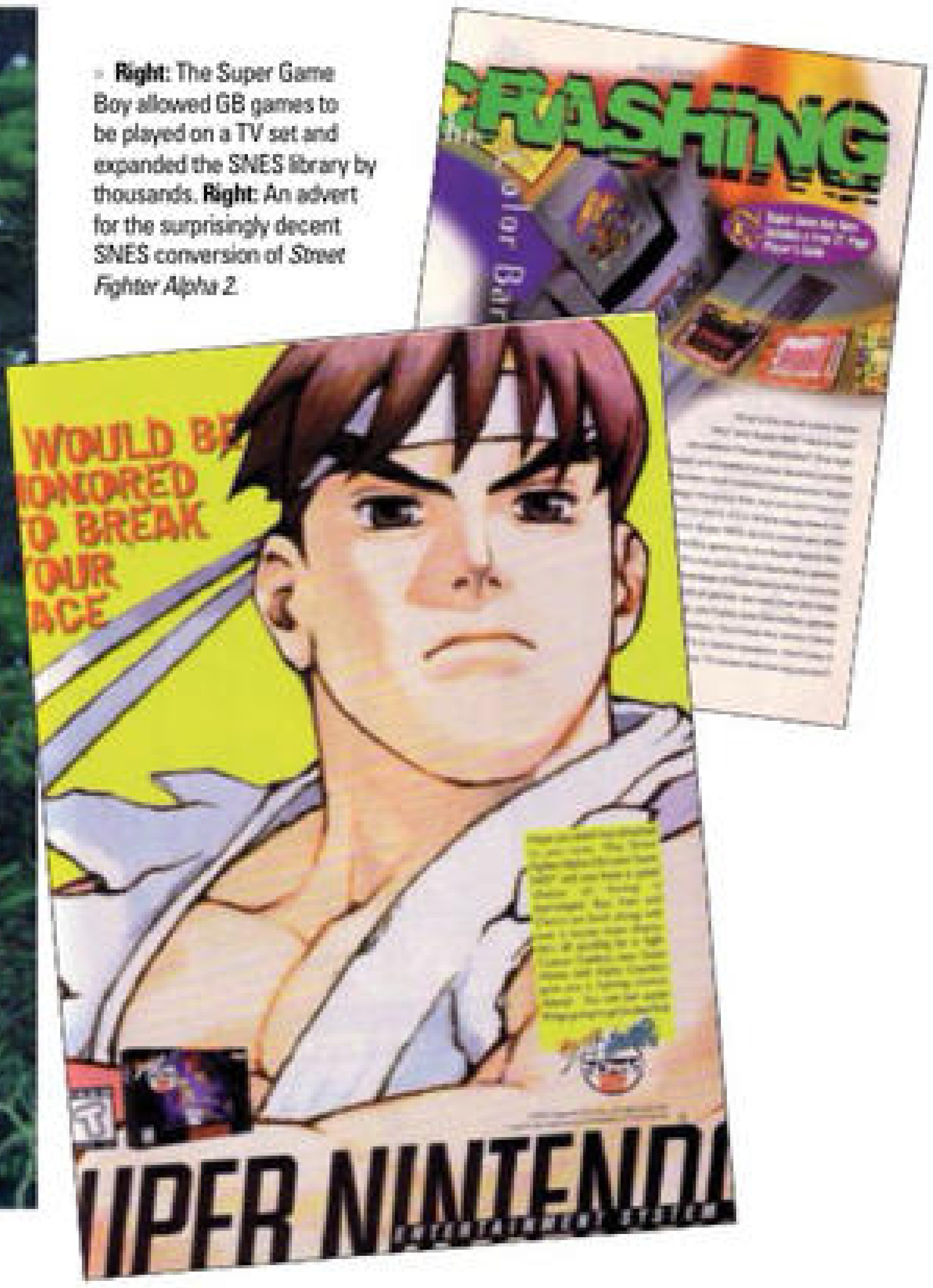
[SNES] *Super Castlevania* was yet another fantastic release from Konami e of the last games to be released for the Super Famicom in 1999.



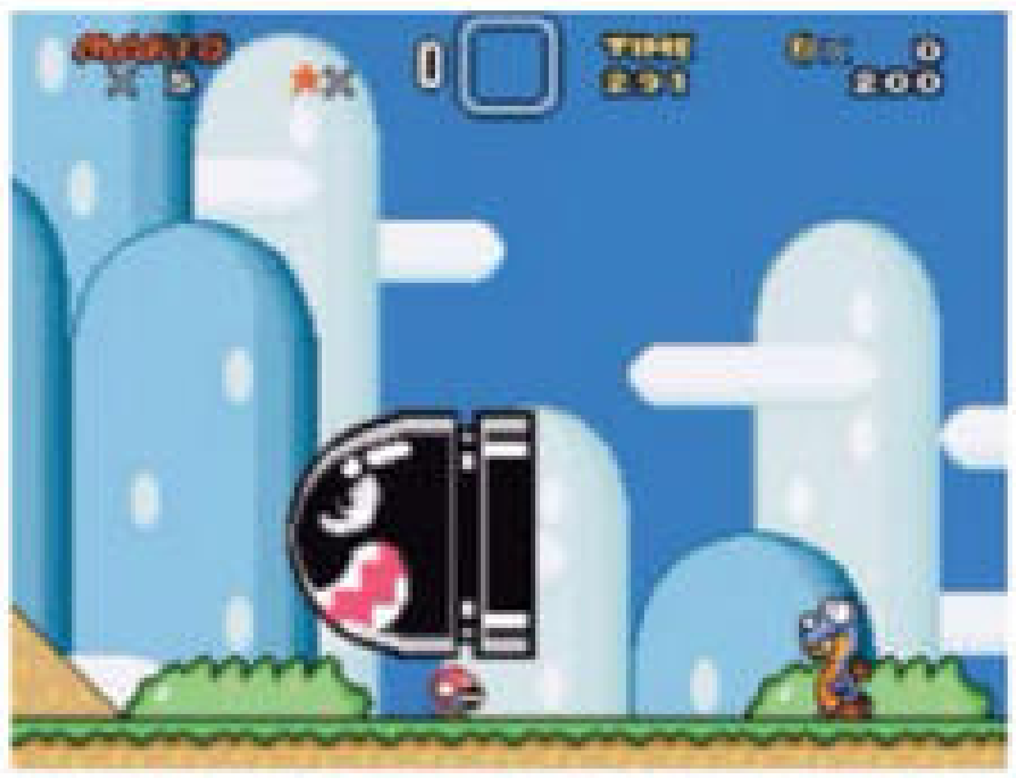
[SNES] *Donkey Kong Country* used Rare's "Advanced Computer Modelling" to create previously inconceivable visuals on the ageing SNES.

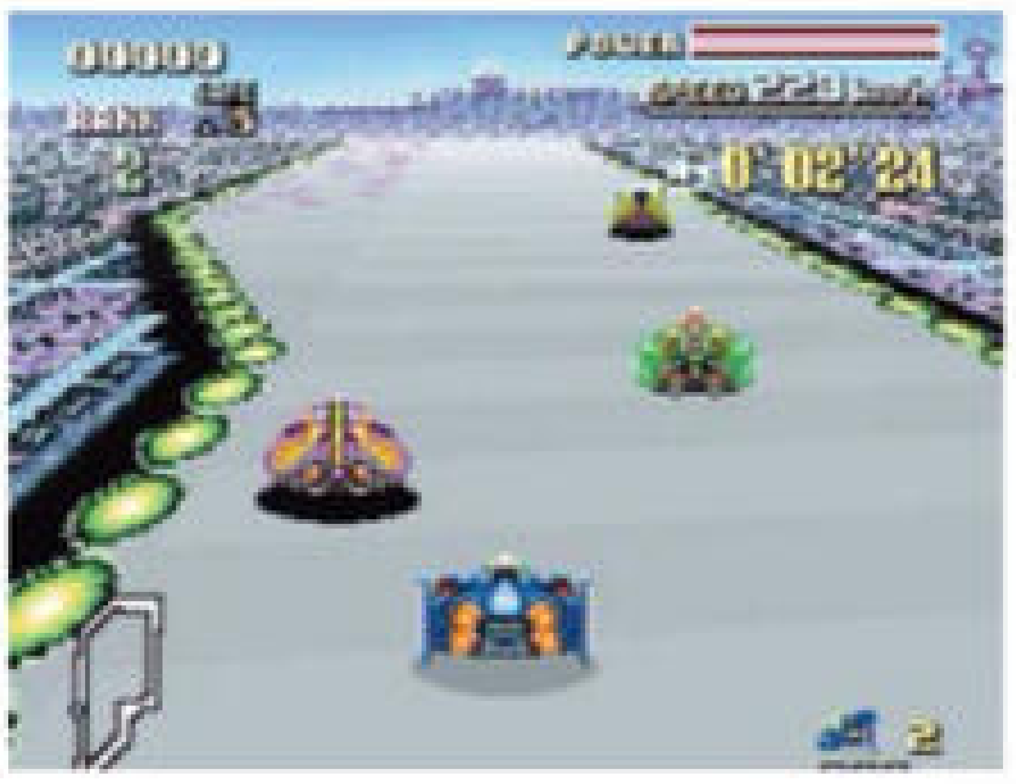


An enigmatic 2-page advert for *Secret Of Mana* that bravely chose not to use screenshots.

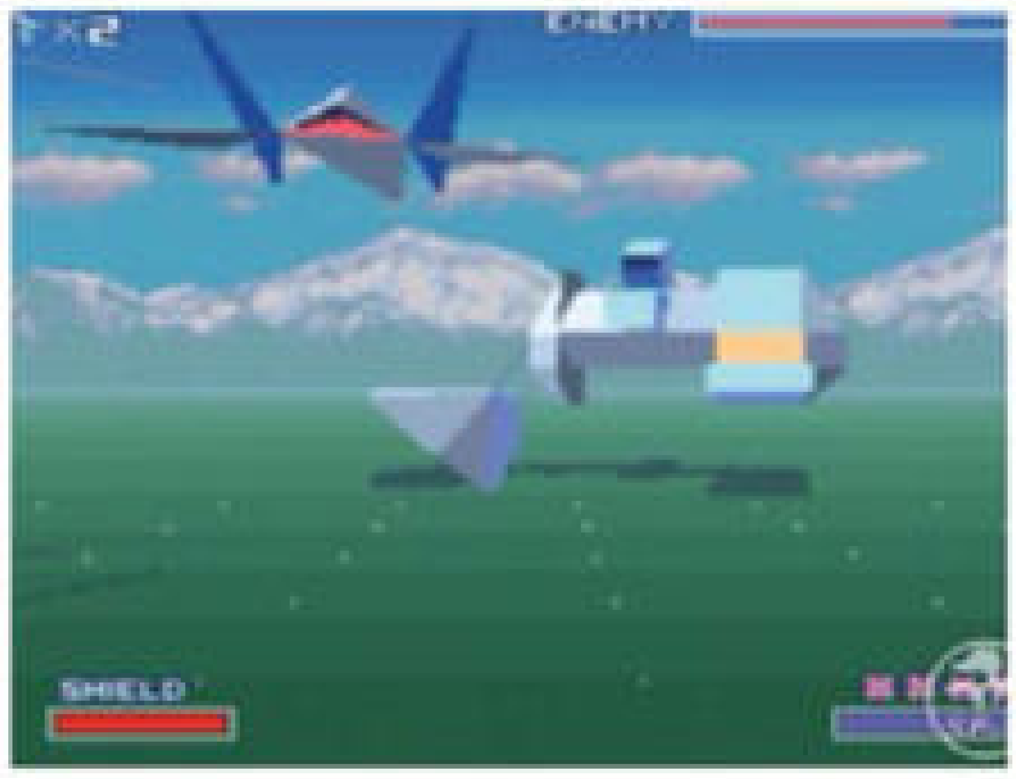


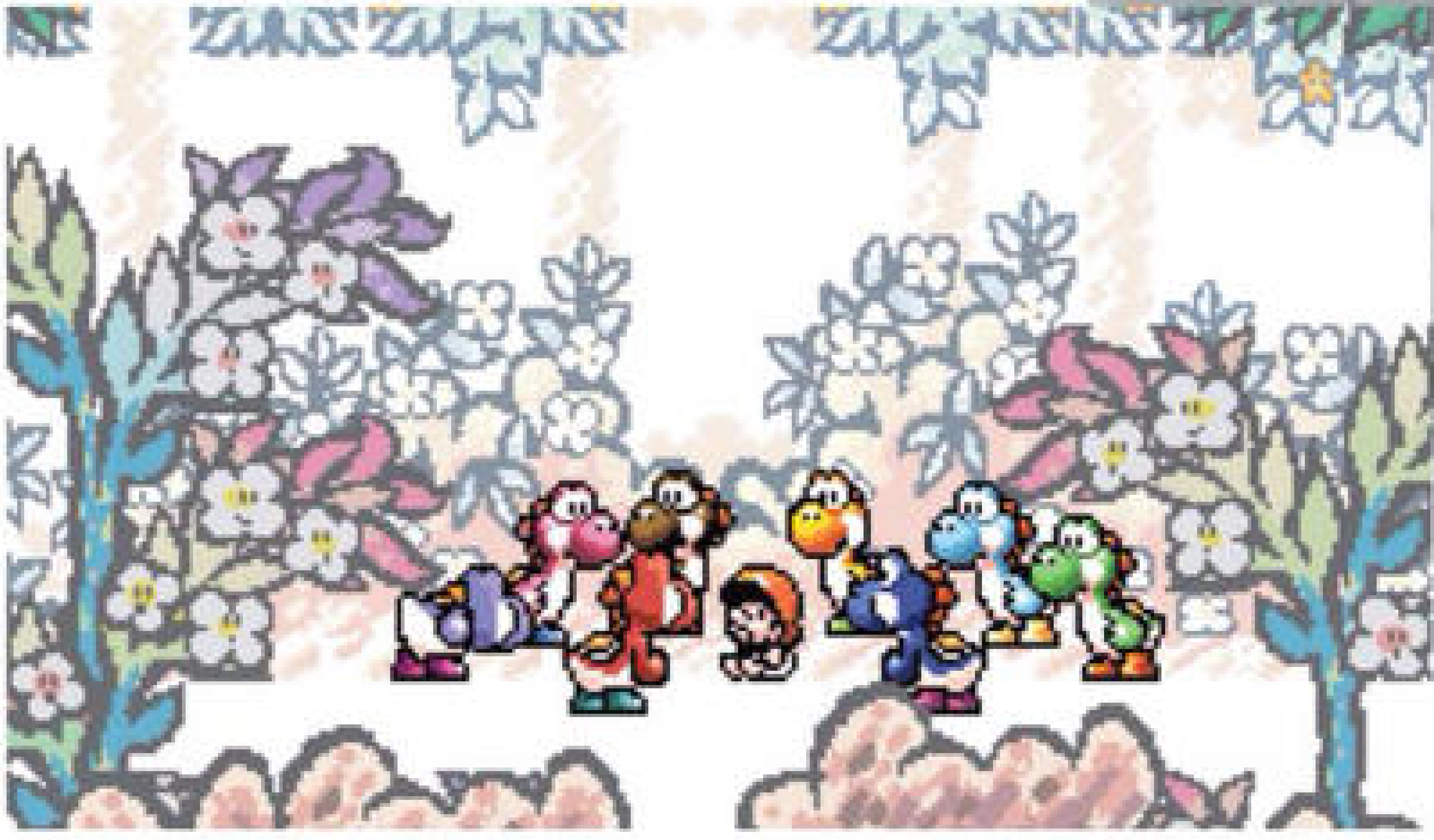
Right: The Super Game Boy allowed GB games to be played on a TV set and expanded the SNES library by thousands. **Right:** An advert for the surprisingly decent SNES conversion of *Street Fighter Alpha 2*.





SUPER NINTENDO
Nintendo
SUPER MARIO KART





» **Top Left and right:** By tying the release of *Super Mario World* to the SNES Nintendo ensure great success for their new console. The "Mode 7" effects in *F-Zero* really showed off the power of the Super Nintendo. **Bottom left and right:** *Star Fox* (renamed *Star Wing* in the UK) used extra hardware to push the SNES beyond its limitations. By arriving so late in the console's life, *Yoshi's Island* went tragically unnoticed

was starting to form: although Sega's success was assured by its in-house conversions and its relationship with EA, it was Nintendo's SNES that turned the most heads by continually providing the classiest most desirable games. It started with *Mario* and *Street Fighter* and continued through *Zelda*, *Secret Of Mana*, *Axelay*, *Super Mario Kart* and hundreds of other top-drawer games that would go on to steal the hearts of hardcore and casual gamers alike.

As the years went by and more powerful competitors (like the 3DO and Jaguar) fell by the wayside the SNES' excellent range of software continued to impress with the aid of Nintendo's quality control and, when it became apparent that the console was beginning to show its age, Nintendo built partnerships with third-party developers to find new ways of making their games look next generation even if the original hardware wasn't. The first of these partnerships came about when the UK's Argonaut Software impressed Nintendo by programming the monochrome Game Boy to display full 3D graphics. On the strength of the Game Boy title, two of Argonaut's employees, Giles Goddard and Dylan Cuthbert, achieved what few British coders have and secured positions at Nintendo's Kyoto headquarters. There they developed the "Mario Chip" (later renamed Super FX) a cartridge embedded co-processor that would allow the SNES to display true 3D polygonal visuals for the first time. The first Super FX game they created, with the legendary design talents of Shigeru Miyamoto, was *Star Fox*: an astounding 3D space combat game that wowed SNES owners of 1993, who couldn't believe the console was capable of such graphics. The following year another incredibly talented UK software house found a way to push the SNES beyond its preconceived limits. Rare, who had previously pushed the ZX Spectrum much further than anyone thought possible, had been using Silicon Graphics workstations to test concepts for Nintendo's next console: the Ultra 64. In doing so they discovered a way of using high quality pre-rendered graphics on the humble SNES, which they used to create the beautiful *Donkey Kong Country* and an arcade conversion of the previously Ultra 64 bound *Killer Instinct*. With the PlayStation and the Saturn on the horizon the startling looks of Rare and Argonaut's games must have made the SNES a very tempting reason to not upgrade.

Nintendo's luck couldn't last forever though and, despite pushing the hardware to its limits, sales of the SNES slowed to a trickle in the UK – due in no small part to the globe-consuming success of the PlayStation. Nevertheless, like all good consoles, the SNES was due a last hurrah and got it in the form of *Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island*. The gorgeous platform game used a combination of Mode 7 and the Super FX2 chip to pump out some of the best effects the SNES had ever seen and with the classic Nintendo gameplay it became one of the console's most loved titles. The gloriously beautiful platform game proved that the Super Nintendo was far from dead but was sadly lost in the excitement of the new era of 3D games and the hype surrounding *Super Mario 64*. Though it attained outstanding critical acclaim, *Yoshi's Island* was a commercial flop in the UK and was one of the last significant SNES titles to see a European release alongside *Donkey Kong Country 3* and *Street Fighter Alpha 2* in December 1996.

As is typical of Japanese consoles, the native Super Famicom lived on much longer than the Western SNES thanks to continued hardware support and a greater demand for software. The Satellaview (see boxout) broadcasted new Super Famicom games directly into players' homes from 1995 to 2000 and, in doing so, kept the large user base active. A new hardware model was introduced in 1998: the Super Famicom Jr was a smaller, sleeker unit that was affordably priced as an alternative to the N64 and allegedly small enough to be sold in street vending machines. Top quality games continued to be released until 2000 with *Fire Emblem: Thracia 776* and a series of *Picross* titles being the most noteworthy.

Production of the Super Famicom finally ceased in late 2003, which may seem like a good innings until you consider that production of the original Famicom was discontinued in the same year. Regardless, throughout its thirteen-year lifespan, the SNES/Super Famicom achieved widespread success and adoration thanks to Nintendo's willingness to keep the machine alive through groundbreaking hardware expansions and a virtually limitless string of superb releases.

A Room with a Satellaview

The Satellaview has such an unusual history that we could fill a RetroInspection on this intriguing add-on alone. The device allowed the Super Famicom to acquire games from St Giga: a popular Japanese satellite service. At prescheduled times the service would broadcast a chosen game which could then be downloaded onto a flash cart and played "offline". The service was discontinued in 2000 but it is still possible to find flash carts with games saved to them. These extreme rarities should be of particular interest to Nintendo fans as the service featured exclusive versions of classic Nintendo games including *Zelda*, *Famicom Wars*, *Fire Emblem* and *Excitebike*. There was even a text based sequel to *Chrono Trigger* (known as *Radical Dreamers*) and some games, like the satellite version of *A Link To The Past*, could only be played at certain times of day because the Satellaview broadcast live voice-acting into the game.

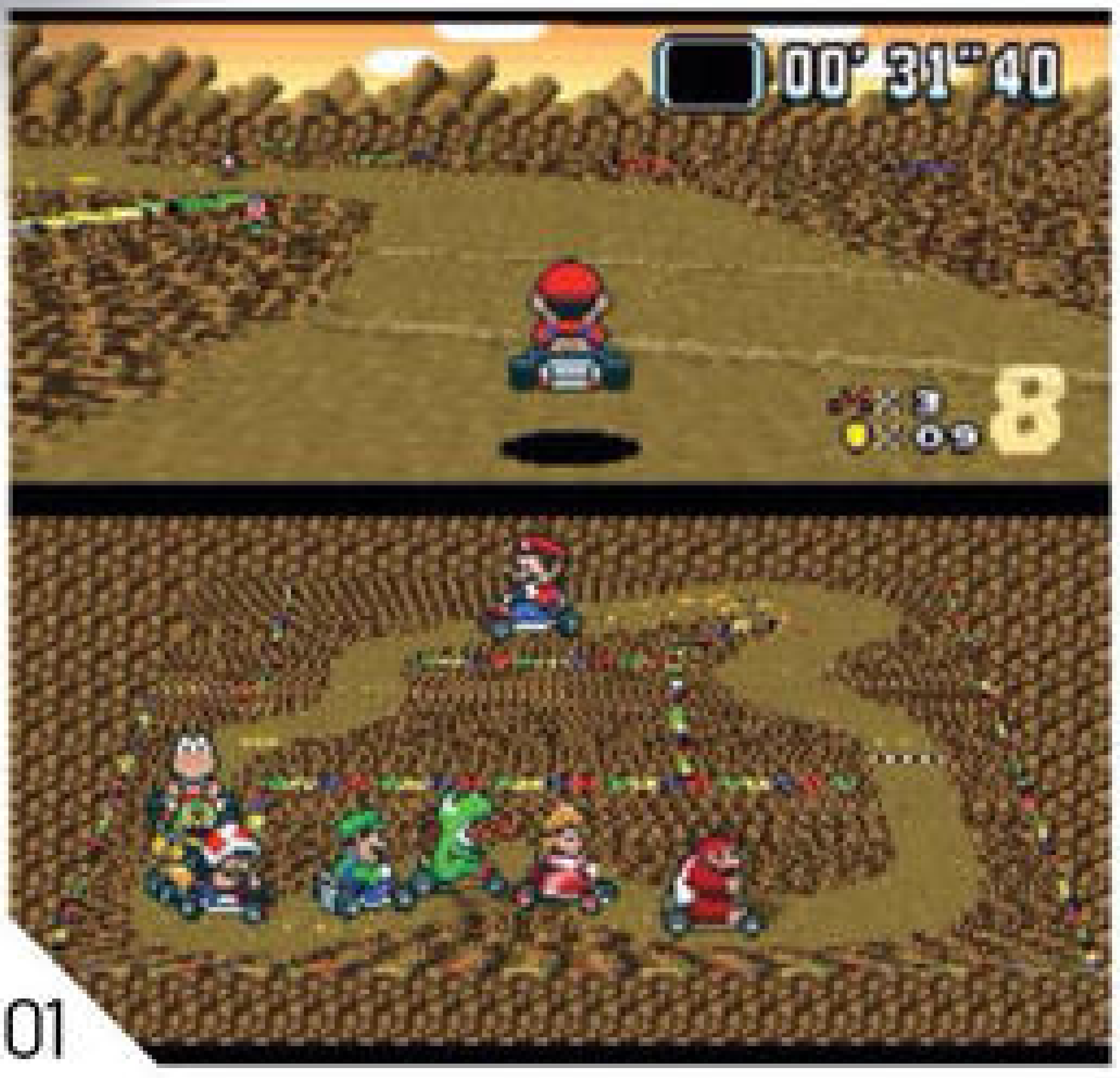
» Hiroshi Yamauchi was the head of Nintendo for 53 years and was instrumental to its early success.

SUPER NINTENDO
SELECT
START
CAPCOM

SNES

PERFECT TEN GAMES

There is a fantastic, diverse range of great games available on the Super Nintendo, which makes putting any selection of games together a near thankless task. We'll happily do it though, as we love Nintendo's 16-bit console. So without further ado, here's our essential choices that deserve to be in every Super Nintendo owner's collection. If you don't own them, you clearly don't love Nintendo's console as much as we do



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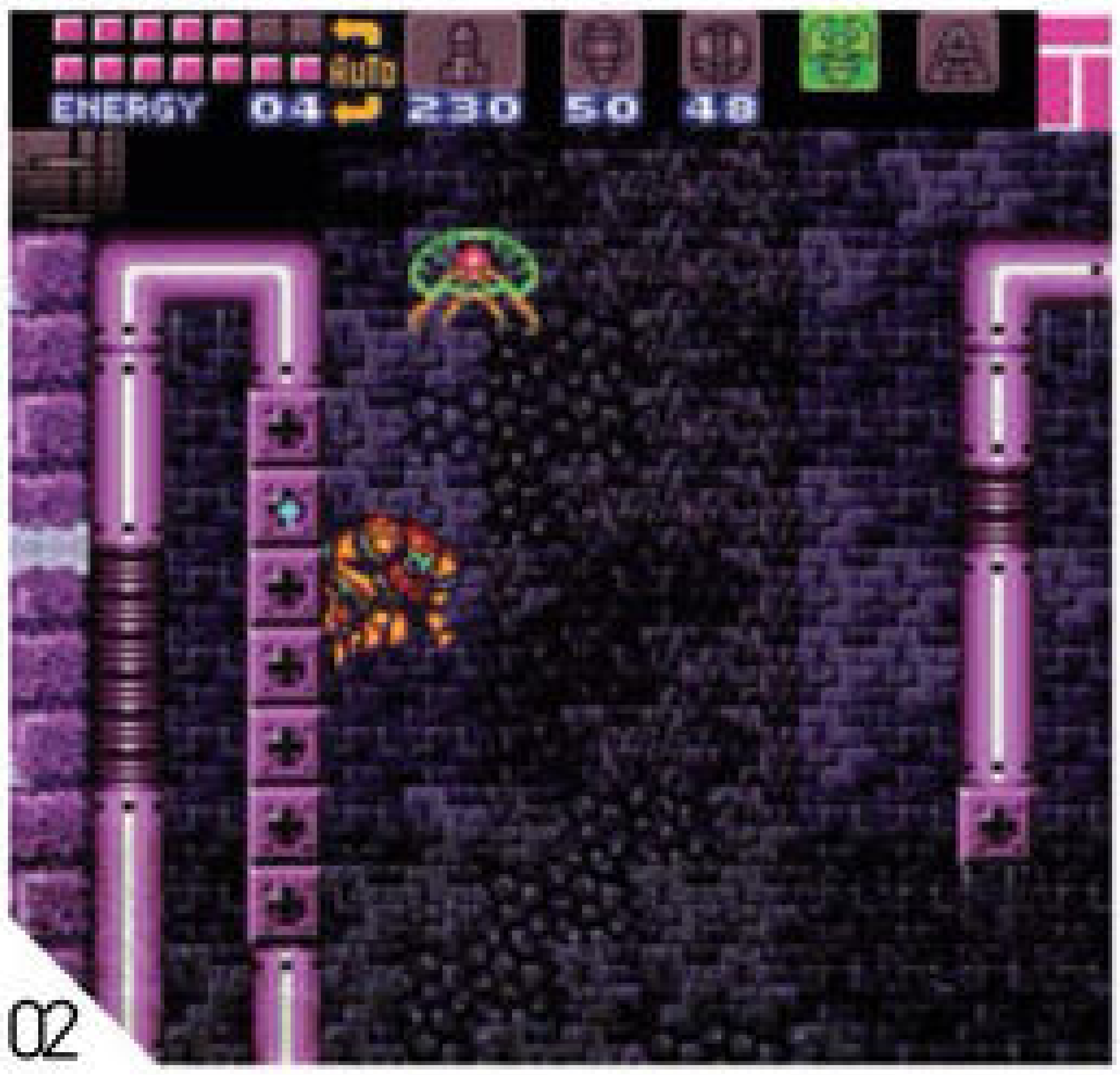

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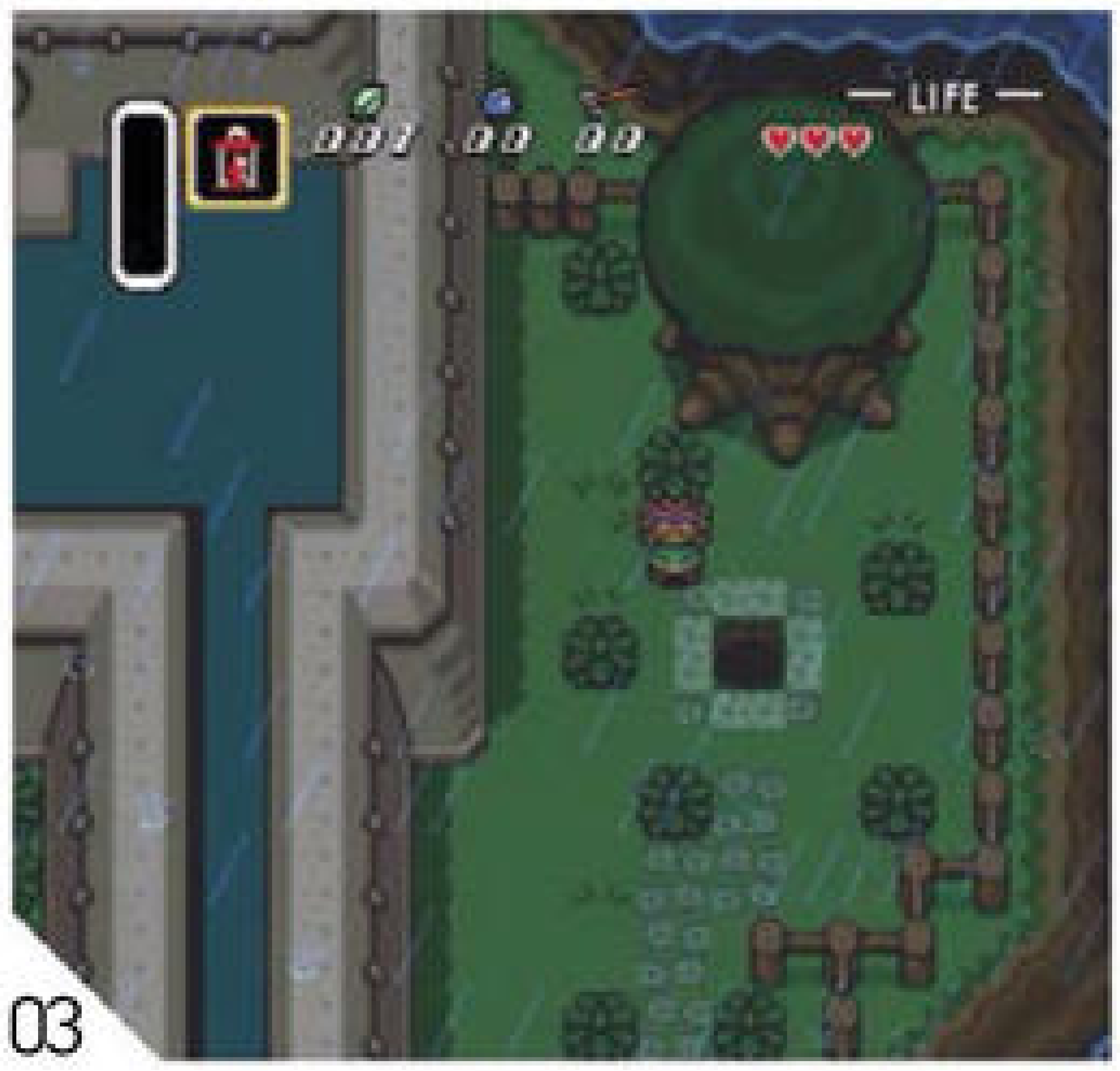

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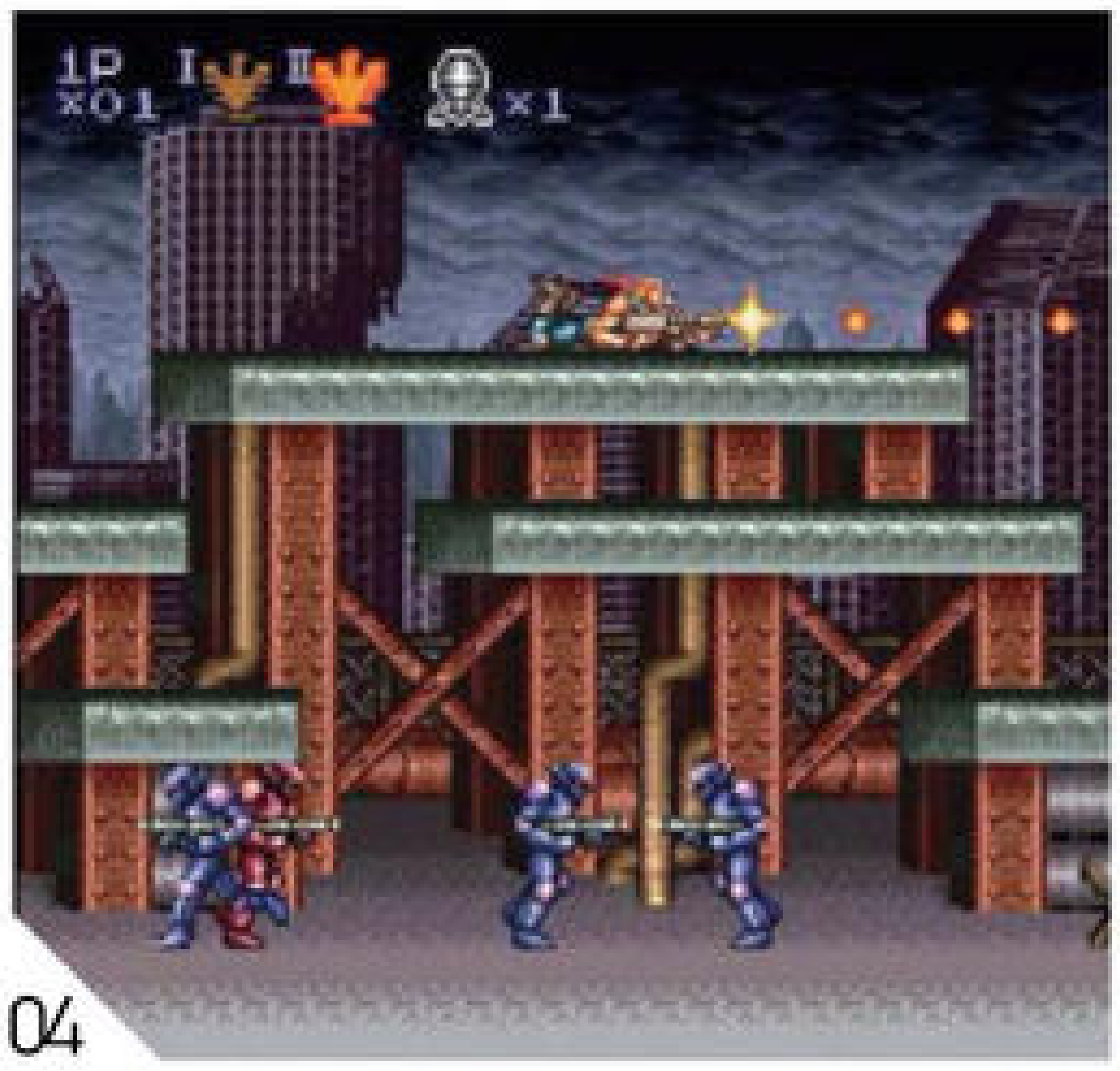


04

SUPER MARIO KART

- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **PUBLISHED BY:** NINTENDO
- **CREATED BY:** NINTENDO
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SUPER MARIO BROS

01 We've been playing the original *Super Mario Kart* on and off now for a staggering 20 years and it still remains fresher than a baker's dozen that's just popped out the oven. Meticulously designed circuits, a well-balanced range of weapons – including the greatly missed feather – and impressive visuals proved perfectly that there was so much more to everyone's favourite plumber than simply jumping on wayward Koopas. While the cups provided plenty of fun, it was the stunning time trial mode and sublime multi-player games that kept us constantly going back for just one more go. Thank god **Retro Gamer** wasn't around at the time of *Mario Kart*'s release; we'd have never got the damned magazine finished on time!

SUPER METROID

- **RELEASED:** 1994
- **PUBLISHED BY:** NINTENDO
- **CREATED BY:** INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** BADVANCE WARS DS

02 *Super Metroid* is a game that works on a variety of levels. While some marvelled at its motherly themes, stunningly created environments and remarkable attention to detail, others were simply impressed with the sheer amount of crap you could blow up in it. Regardless of how you feel about Samus's only 16-bit adventure, there's no denying that *Super Metroid* remains a staggering achievement that perfectly combines the rush of shooting huge bosses with the wonder of exploring vast new areas like no other SNES game around. Little wonder then that it took Nintendo eight years to come up with a sequel that could do it justice.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST

- **RELEASED:** 1992
- **PUBLISHED BY:** NINTENDO
- **CREATED BY:** NINTENDO
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE OCARINA OF TIME

03 There's no denying the superiority of *Ocarina Of Time*, but *A Link To The Past* remains a wonderfully accomplished adventure that deserves to sit proudly in every SNES owner's collection. Every dungeon you explore is crafted to perfection, and while they start off easy, you'll soon be scratching your head over Miyamoto's deviously designed puzzles. The many weapons you discover are well balanced and every encountered boss is a masterstroke in design. Then of course you have the two unique worlds that Link can eventually switch between, thus making an already sprawling game even larger. Quite simply one of the finest 16-bit adventures ever made.

CONTRA III: THE ALIEN WARS

- **RELEASED:** 1992
- **PUBLISHED BY:** KONAMI
- **CREATED BY:** KONAMI
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SUPER CASTLEVANIA IV

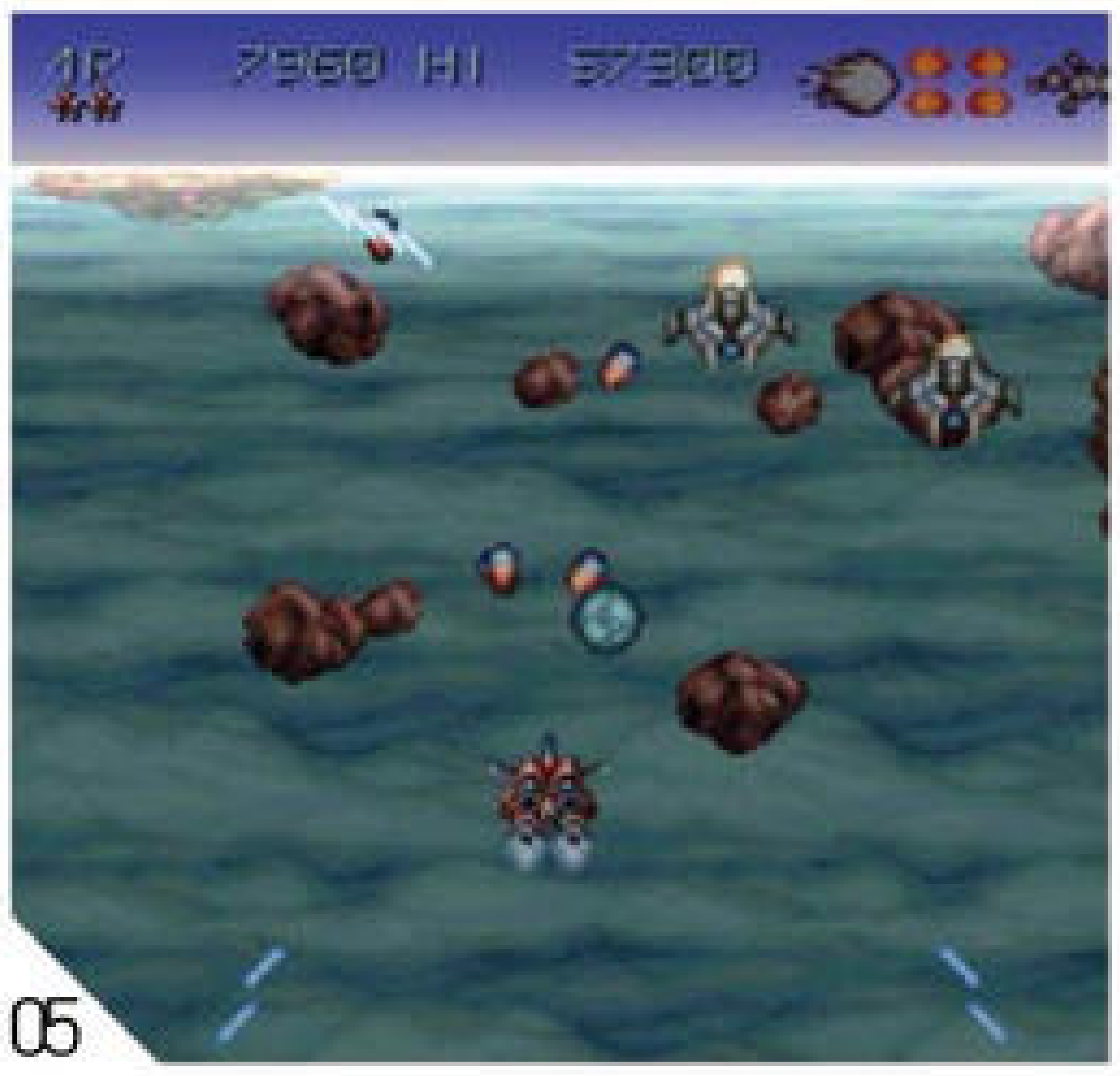
04 Konami released some outstanding titles for Nintendo's 16-bit wonder, but this cracking effort from 1992 is arguably one of its best efforts.

Each level is a rollercoaster ride of destruction and featured the SNES hardware on fine form. Sprites are full of detail, the game's many bosses a joy to behold, and there's a ridiculous amount of Mode 7 trickery going on. Add in a fantastic, stomping soundtrack, an awesome array of different weapons and some groovy overhead levels (that can be rotated with the left and right triggers) and you have a run-and-gun title that would be essential on any format.

AXELAY

- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **PUBLISHED BY:** KONAMI
- **CREATED BY:** KONAMI
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** GRADIUS III

05 There's a host of great shooters available for the SNES, but few can compare to the brilliance that is Konami's stunning *Axelay*. From its quasi-3D levels to its utterly amazing music, every moment of *Axelay* is exhilarating to play through. While the level design and available weapons are worthy of praise, it's the immense, striking bosses the game constantly throws at you that truly astound. Huge metallic spiders, colossal ED-209 styled mechs and a gigantic lava creature are just a few of the mayors you have to deal with and each is breath-taking to behold. Why's it's never been released on the GBA we'll never know…



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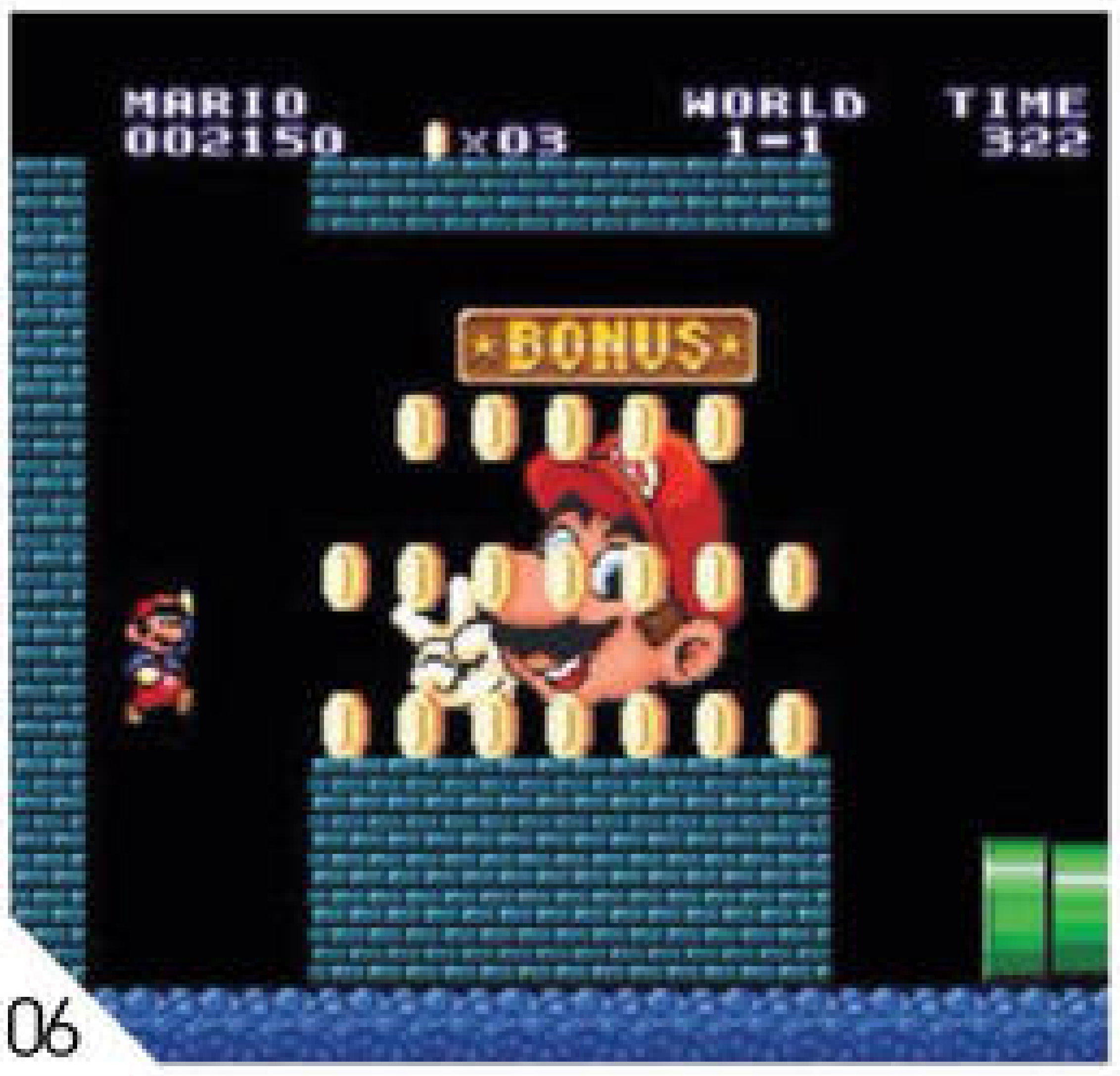

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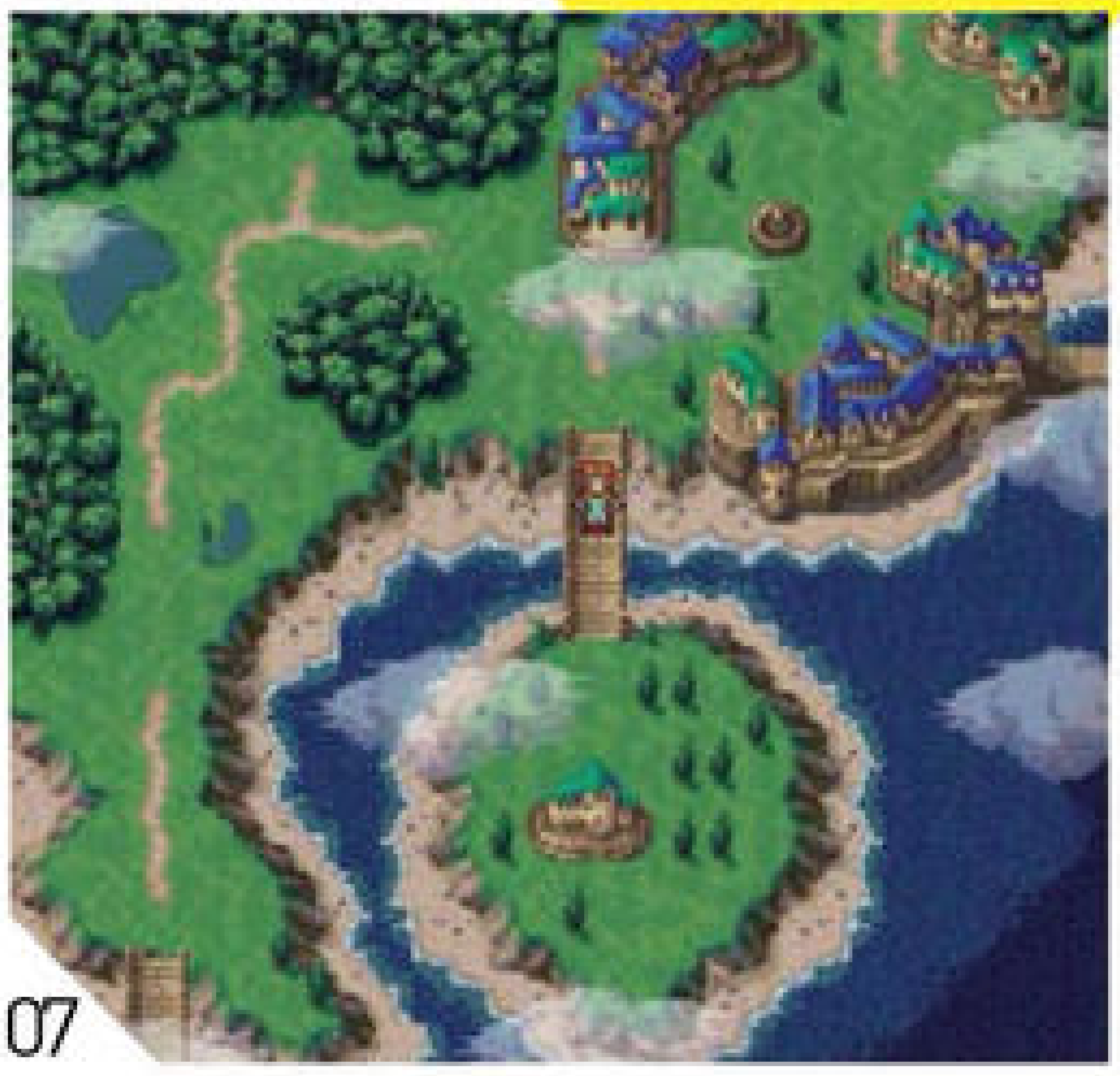

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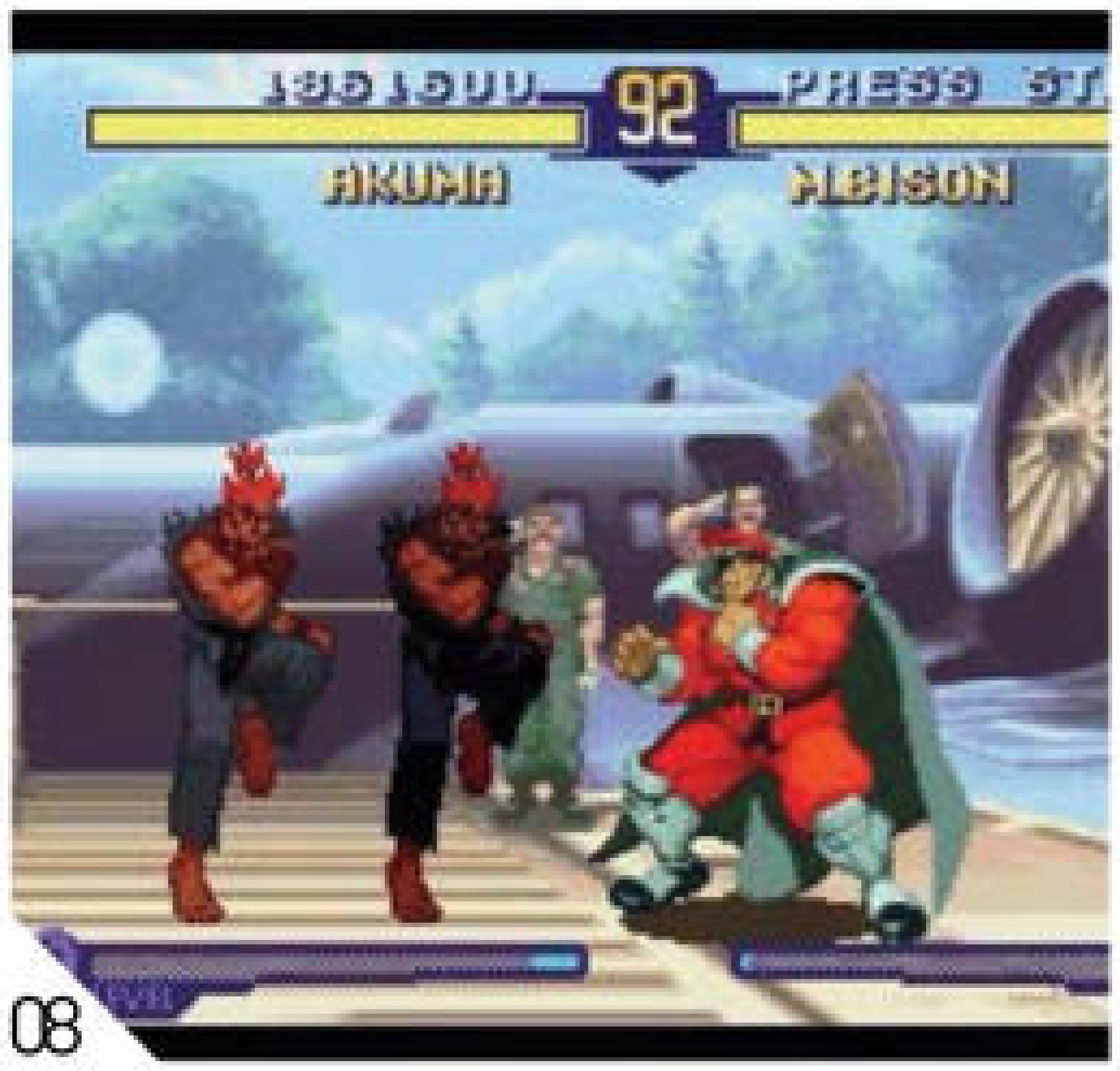

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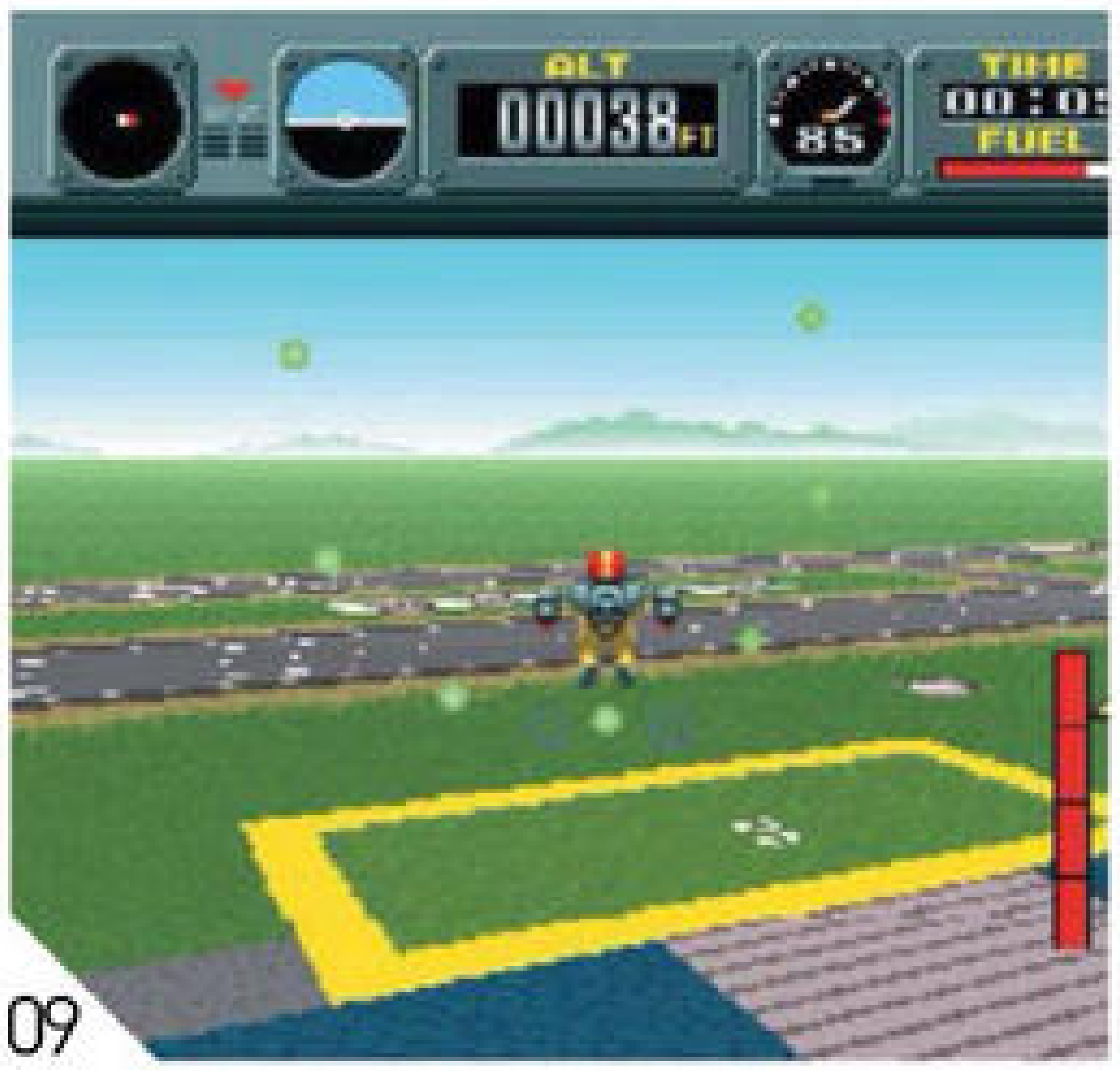

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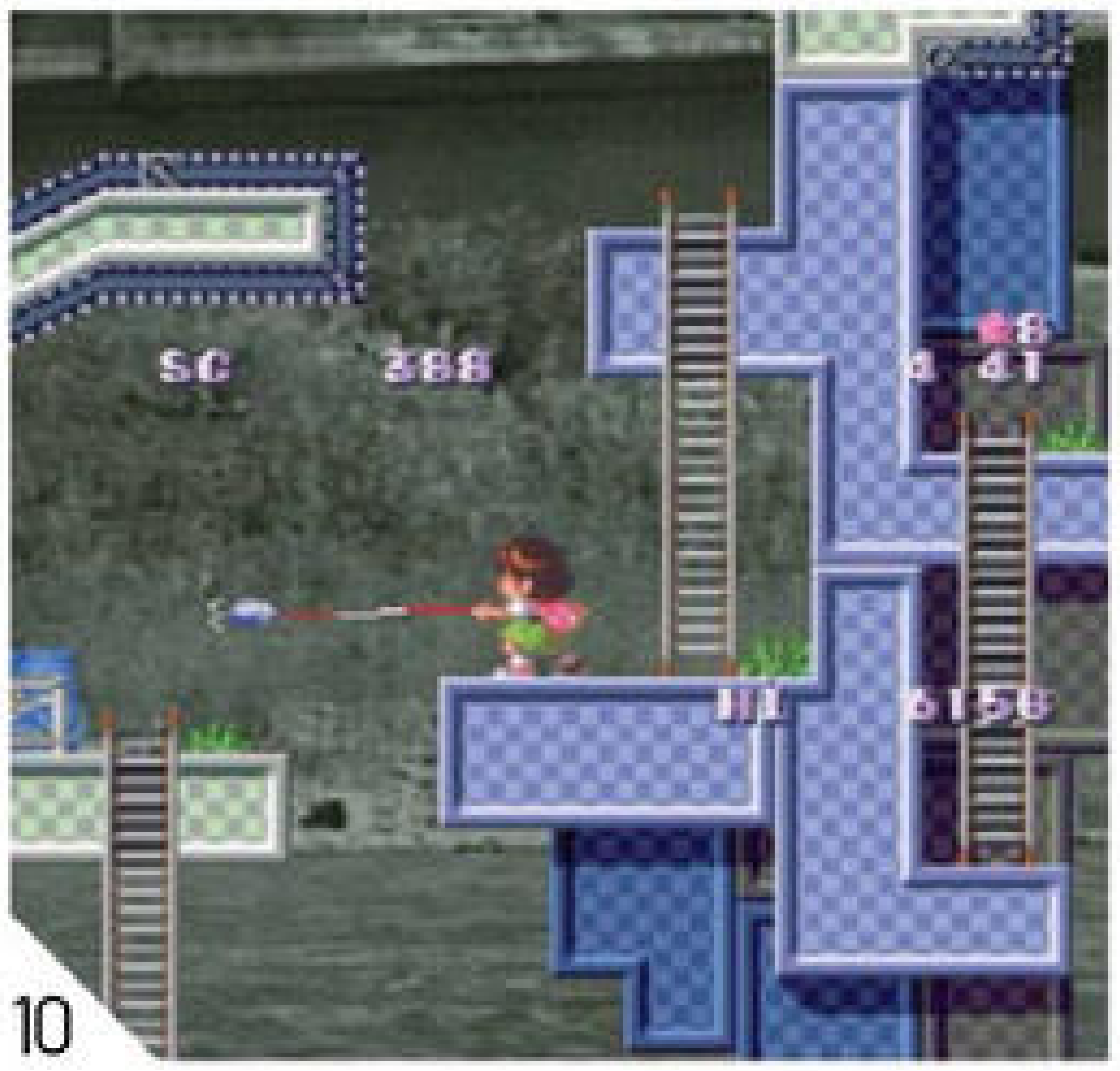

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SUPER MARIO ALL-STARS

- » **RELEASED:** 1993
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** NINTENDO
- » **CREATED BY:** NINTENDO
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SUPER MARIO SUNSHINE

06 What's better than three classic *Mario* NES outings on one cartridge? Why, three *Mario* NES games with improved aesthetics and a fourth exclusive title that had only originally appeared in Japan of course!

All-Stars' triple whammy of *Super Mario Bros 1, 2* and *3* made it incredible value for money and were great examples of taking old games and updating them for a newer platform. Add in *Super Mario Bros: The Lost Levels*, which was effectively a tougher version of the original game and allowed you to choose from either brother and you had an amazingly comprehensive package. Finally, if you bought the version that came boxed with a SNES you received *Super Mario World* on the cartridge. Bargain!

CHRONO TRIGGER

- » **RELEASED:** 1995
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** SQUARESOFT
- » **CREATED BY:** SQUARESOFT
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** FINAL FANTASY X

07 It would have been all too easy to go with Squaresoft's *Secret Of Mana*, so we've decided to focus on this little beauty instead.

While Squaresoft's epic RPG borrows plenty of ideas from the *Final Fantasy* series, you just can't help but be impressed by the sheer amount of love that has gone into crafting this astonishing RPG. Although the central storyline is fairly predictable, it soon begins to twist and turn all over the place and introduces plenty of memorable characters and sub plots. The combat system is a joy to use and the use of sound throughout is outstanding. It all combines to create one of the most engrossing RPGs we've ever played. Utterly essential.

STREET FIGHTER ALPHA II

- » **RELEASED:** 1996
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** CAPCOM
- » **CREATED BY:** CAPCOM
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SUPER GHOULS 'N GHOSTS

08 Capcom's second *Alpha* title was released late in the SNES's life, and as a result, was sadly overlooked by a great many gamers who had moved on to the newer, flashier consoles.

Their loss was our gain however, as it's easily one the best brawlers on Nintendo's 16-bit wonder. Great looking sprites, a solid roster of characters, new moves, plenty of additional animation and thumping good gameplay made *Alpha II* a winner. We've no idea why the first game didn't appear on the SNES, but Capcom more than made up for it with this excellent sequel. An outstanding fighter that deserves to be in everyone's SNES collection.

PILOTWINGS

- » **RELEASED:** 1993
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** NINTENDO
- » **CREATED BY:** NINTENDO
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** DONKEY KONG

09 The Mode 7 chip was used in countless numbers of SNES games, but never was its appearance more noticeable than in the wondrous *Pilotwings*.

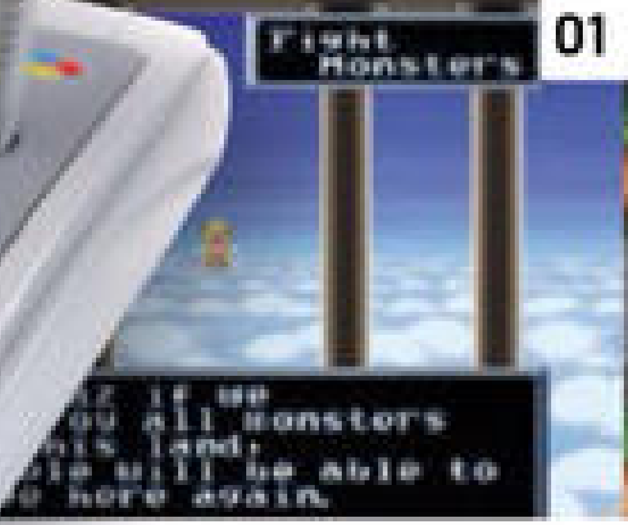
Taking control of a budding pilot, all the game required you to do was master licences for four different events: Skydiving, Rocketbelt, Light Plane and Hang Glider. While some of *Pilotwings'* events could be tricky to get to grips with, the elation you felt when they were finally mastered more than made up for it. Thanks to the excellent Mode 7 effects the sense of scale you encountered as you flew through the air was breath-taking, and wait until you finally get to use the hang glider… Marvellous.

UMIHARA KAWASE

- » **RELEASED:** 1994
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** NHK
- » **CREATED BY:** TNN
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SHIJOU SAIKYOU LEAGUE SERIE A: ACE STRIKER

10 It seems only fair to put at least one quirky Japanese title in the top ten, so our vote goes to the delightful *Umihara Kawase*.

Taking control of an adorably cute little girl, the aim of each stage is simple – avoid the bizarre fishy enemies and reach the door on each exit. Of course, said exit is often out of reach, and with your little tyke not being that great a jumper she has to rely on a handy elastic rope to get her around. Think *Bionic Commando* but with some decent rope physics thrown into the mix and you have a good idea of what to expect.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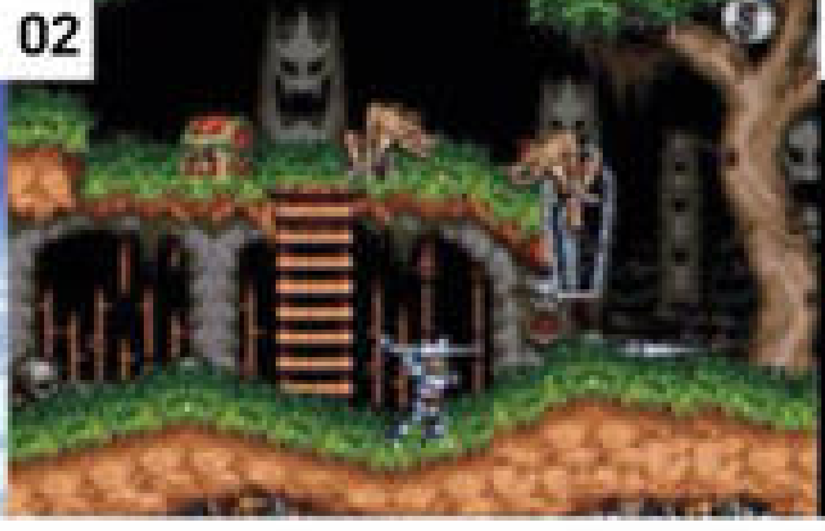
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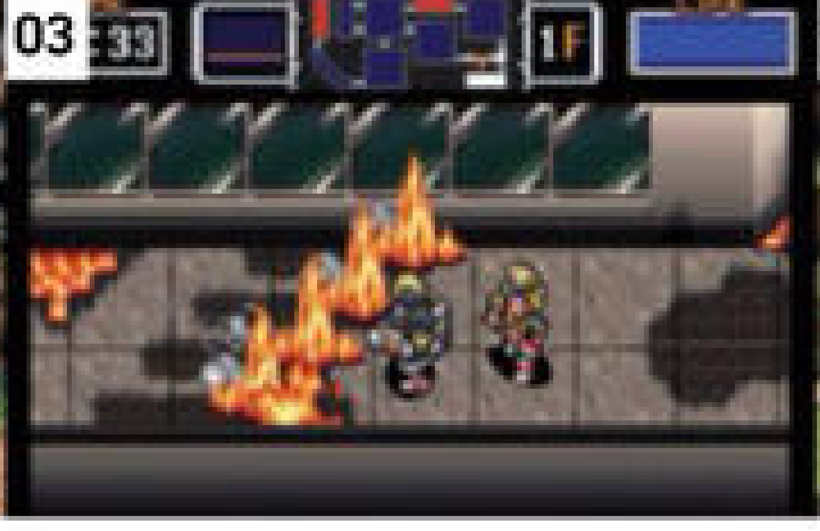
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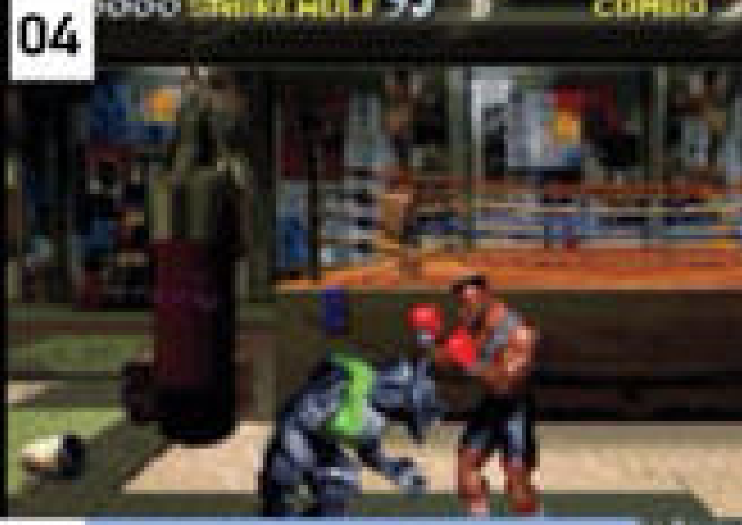
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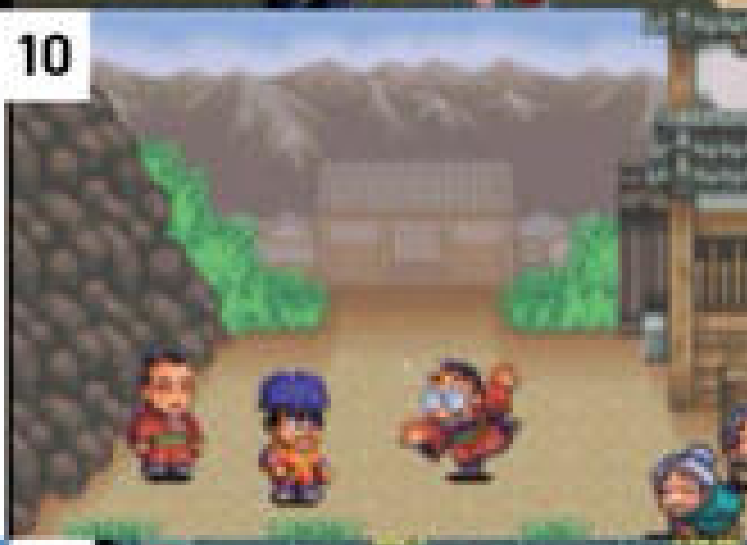
SNES and the rest...

Nintendo's 16-bit console was an absolute powerhouse of a machine and supported an amazing array of different genres. From hit arcade conversions to the incredibly obscure, the SNES had something for everyone

01 ACTRAISER
02 SUPER GHOULS 'N' GHOSTS
03 THE FIREMEN
04 KILLER INSTINCT
05 DONALD DUCK
06 SUPER BOMBERMAN
07 THE ADVENTURES OF BATMAN & ROBIN
08 MAGIC SWORD
09 CONTRA III: THE ALIEN WAR
10 GANBARE GOEMON 2
11 SHADOWRUN
12 TERRANIGMA
13 MEGA MAN X
14 CANNON FODDER
15 SUPER METROID
16 POCKY & ROCKY
17 DONKEY KONG COUNTRY
18 JOE & MAC
19 PILOTWINGS
20 TETRIS BATTLE GAIDEN
21 SUPER MARIO ALL-STARS
22 ALADDIN
23 BREATH OF FIRE
24 GOKUJOU PARODIUS
25 STUNT RACE FX
26 EYE OF THE BEHOLDER
27 SIM CITY
28 STARWING
29 FIRST SAMURAI
30 ARKANOID: DOH IT AGAIN
31 BLACKTHORNE
32 PRINCE OF PERSIA
33 CACOMA KNIGHT
34 SUPER STREET FIGHTER 2: TURBO HYPER FIGHTING
35 THE ADDAMS FAMILY
36 FINAL FIGHT GUY
37 MICKY MANIA
38 SUPER MARIO WORLD
39 CYBERNATOR
40 LEMMINGS
41 ACTRAISER
42 BATTLETOADS & DOUBLE DRAGON: THE ULTIMATE TEAM
43 THE CHAOS ENGINE
44 MR DO!
45 SECRET OF MANA
46 SUPER SMASH TV
47 DARIUS TWIN
48 SUPER TENNIS
49 UNIRALLY
50 ASTERIX & OBELIX
51 SUPER CASTLEVANIA IV
52 BURAI
53 PLOK!
54 R-TYPE III: THE THIRD LIGHTNING
55 THUNDER SPIRITS
56 UMIHARA KAWASE
57 EARTHBOUND
58 INTERNATIONAL SUPERSTAR SOCCER
59 RENDERING RANGER
60 SUPER MARIO RPG: LEGEND OF THE SEVEN STARS
61 U.N. SQUADRON
62 THE LORD OF THE RINGS
63 TOP GEAR
64 AXELAY
65 DEMON'S CREST
66 NINJA GAIDEN TRILOGY
67 SUPER PUNCH-OUT!!
68 F-ZERO
69 SUPER STAR WARS
70 TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES IV: TURTLES IN TIME
71 ART OF FIGHTING 2
72 CAPTAIN COMMANDO
73 SUPER MARIO KART
74 GRADIUS III
75 BATTLE CARS
76 SUPER MARIO WORLD 2: YOSHI'S ISLAND
77 THE SIMPSONS: BART'S NIGHTMARE
78 BIO METAL
79 THE LEGEND OF THE MYSTICAL NINJA
80 EARTHWORM JIM
81 CLAY FIGHTER 2
82 THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST
83 SUPER STREET FIGHTER 2: THE NEW CHALLENGERS
84 THE KING OF DRAGONS
85 MICRO MACHINES
86 DAZE BEFORE CHRISTMAS
87 WILD GUNS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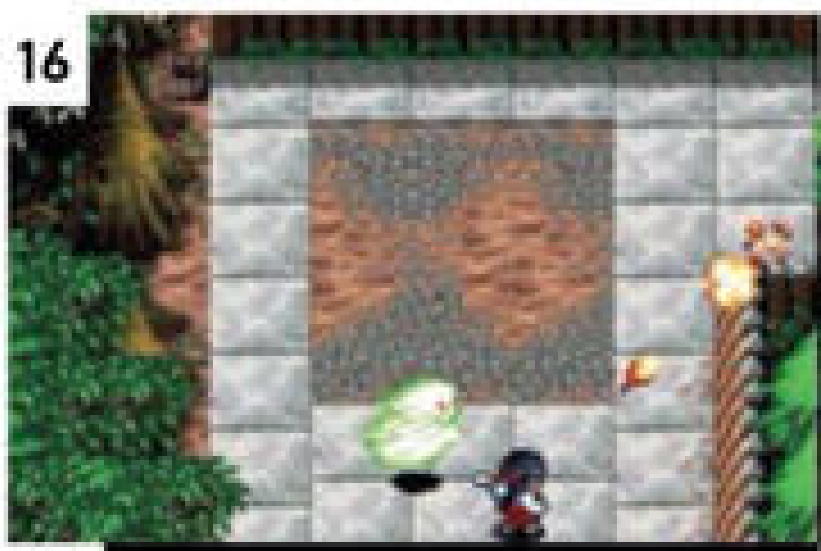
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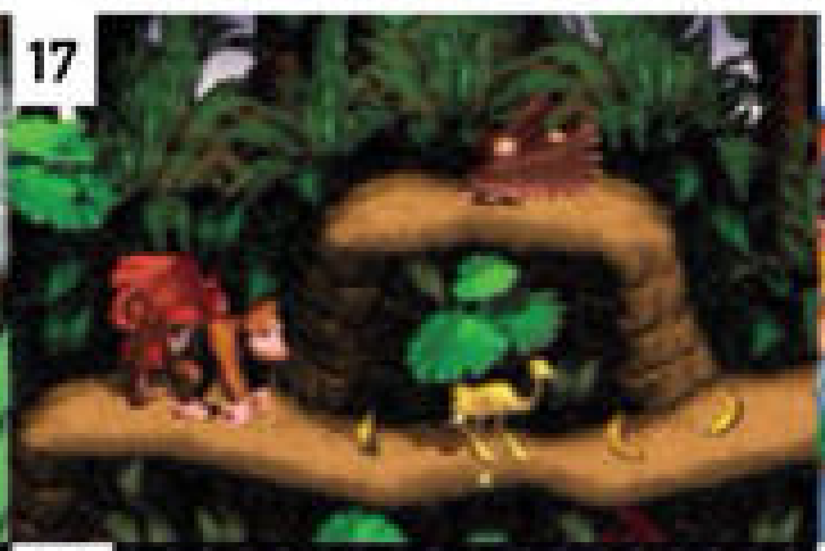
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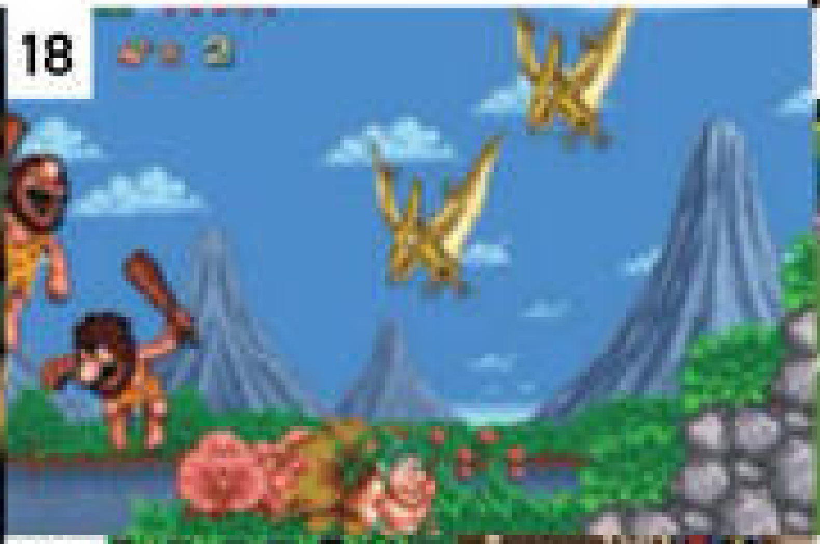
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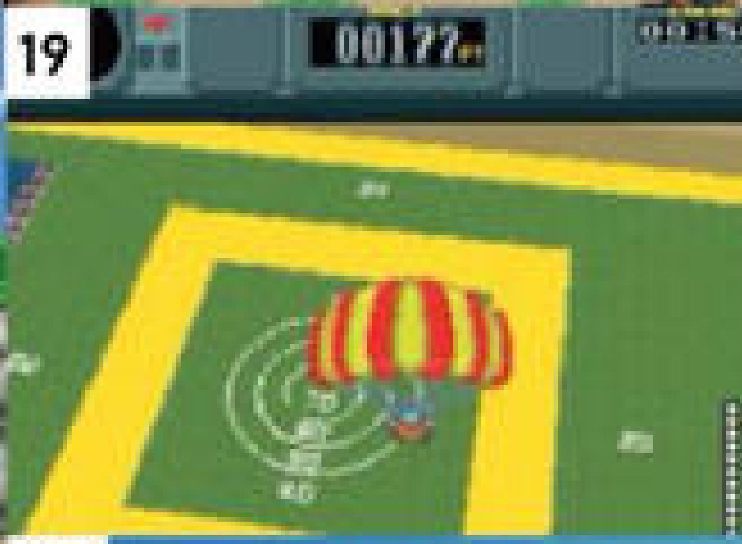
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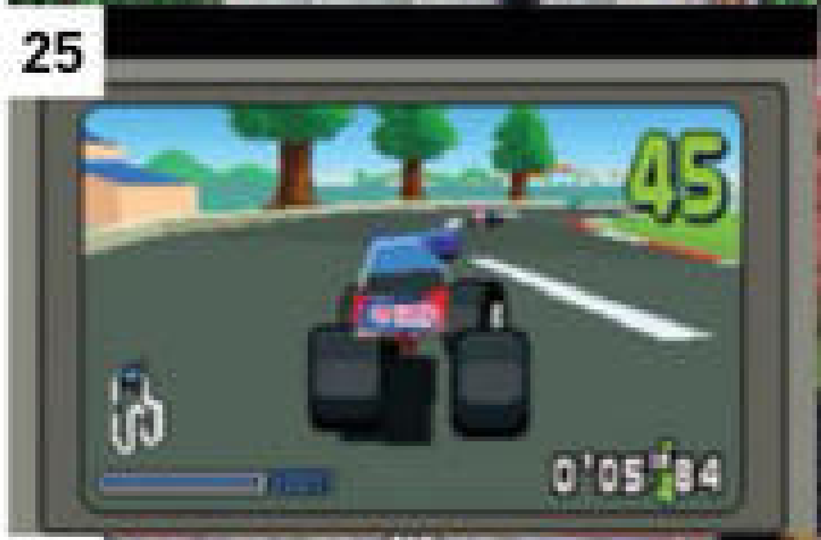
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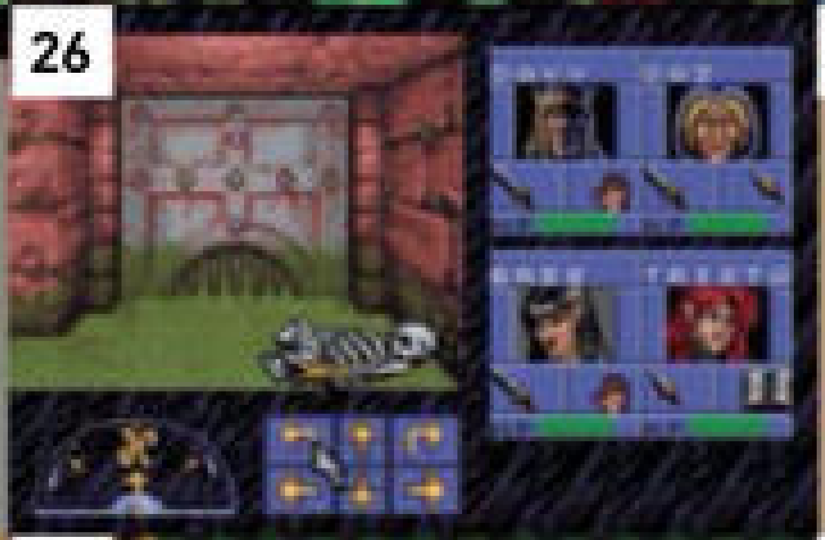
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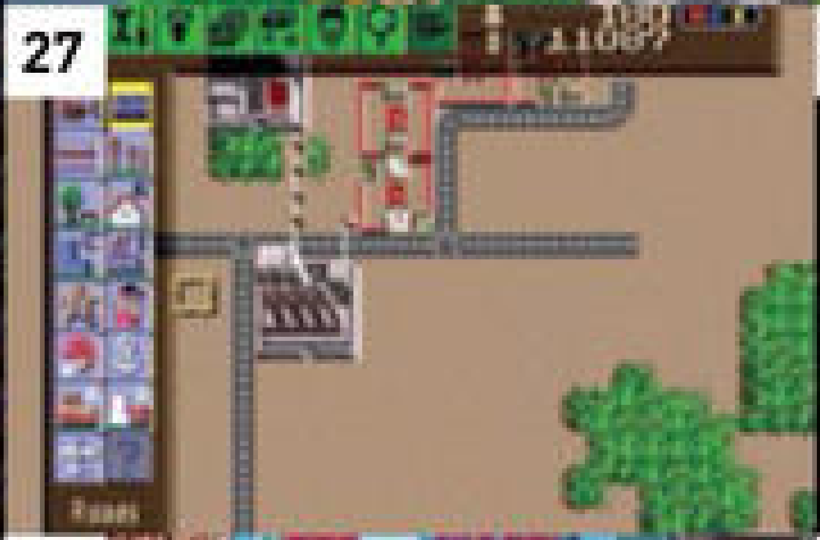
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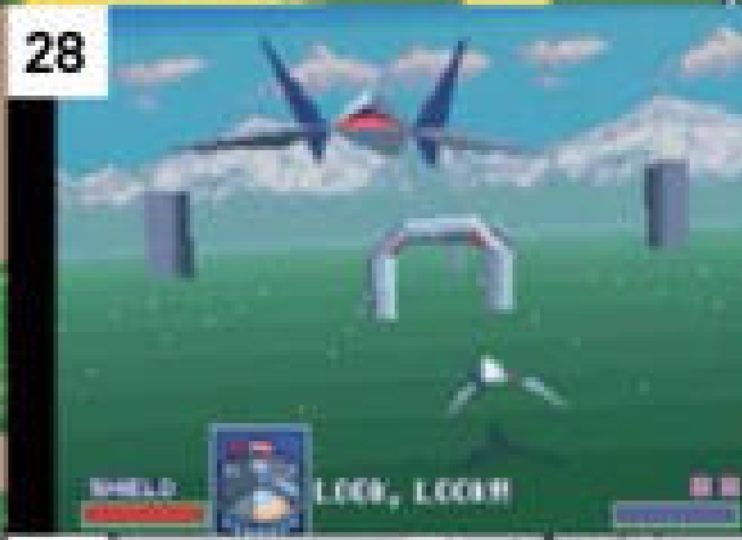
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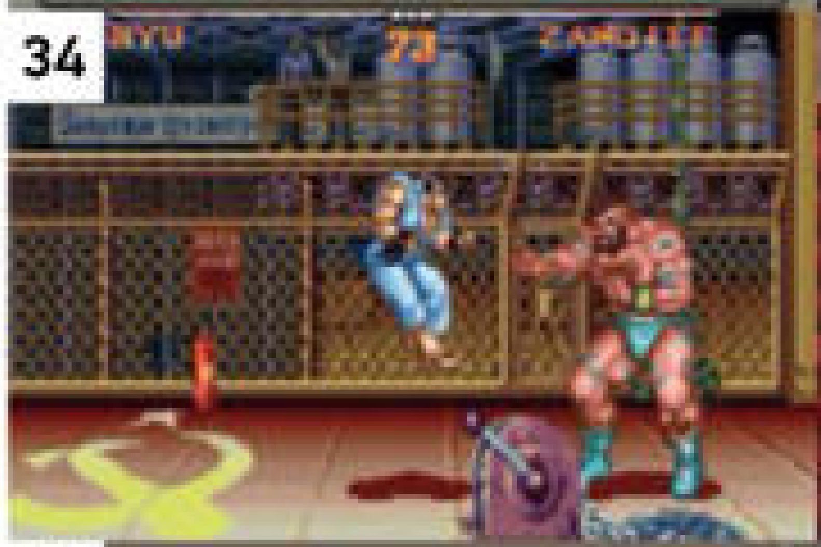
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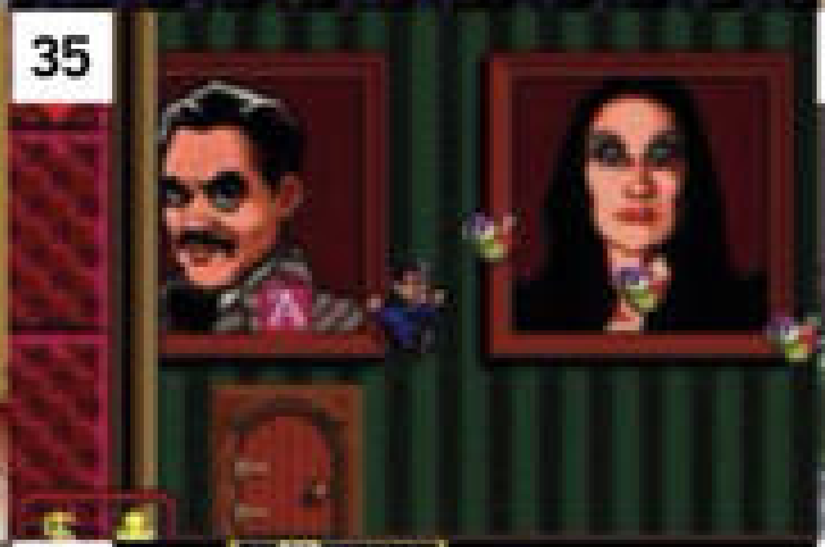
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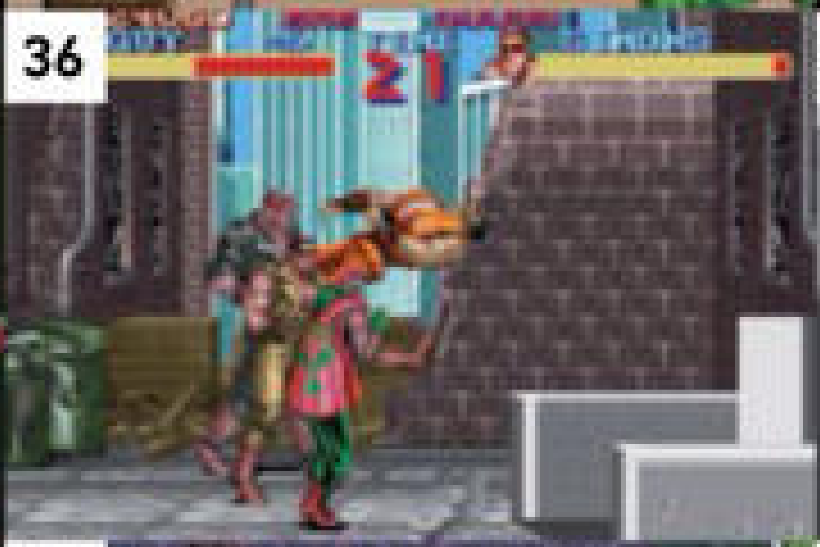
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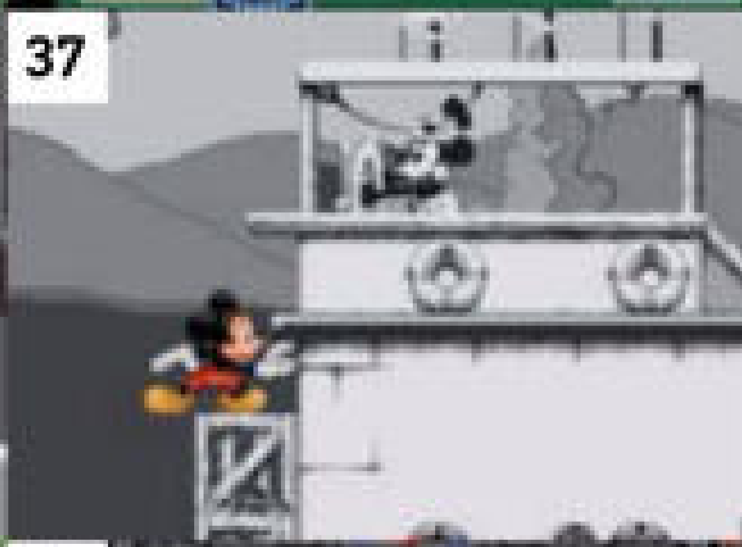
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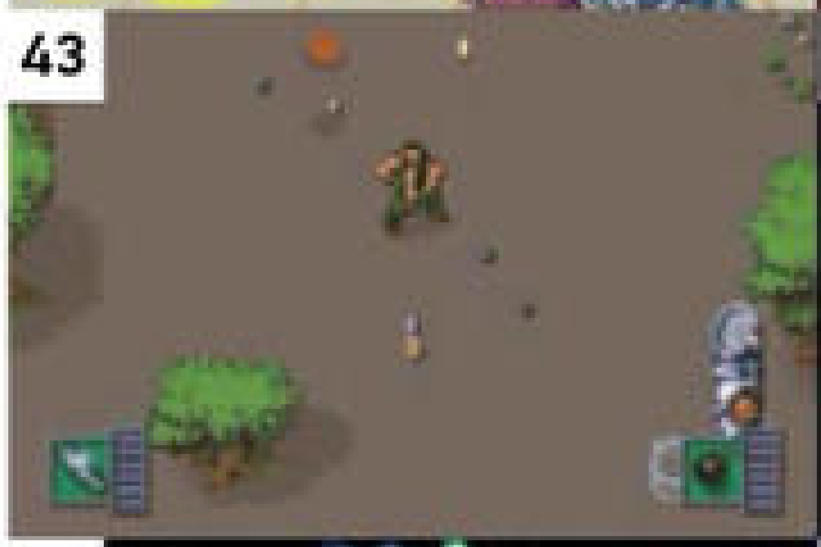
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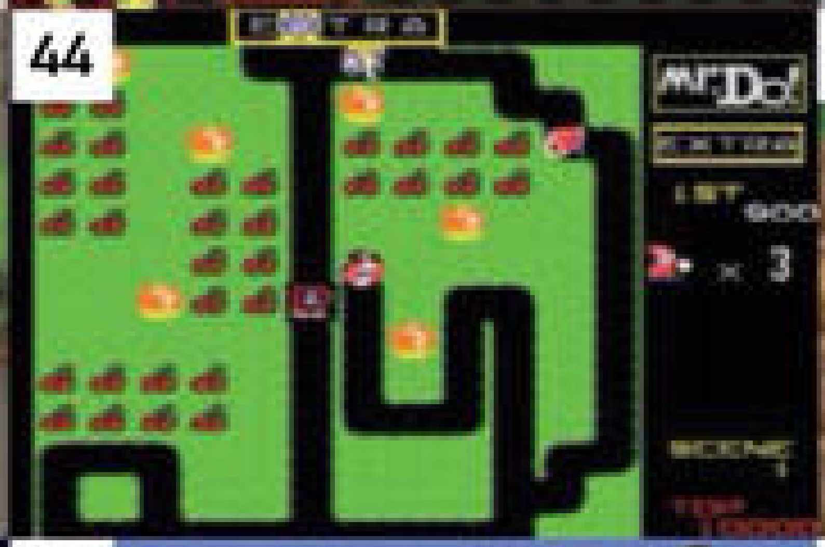
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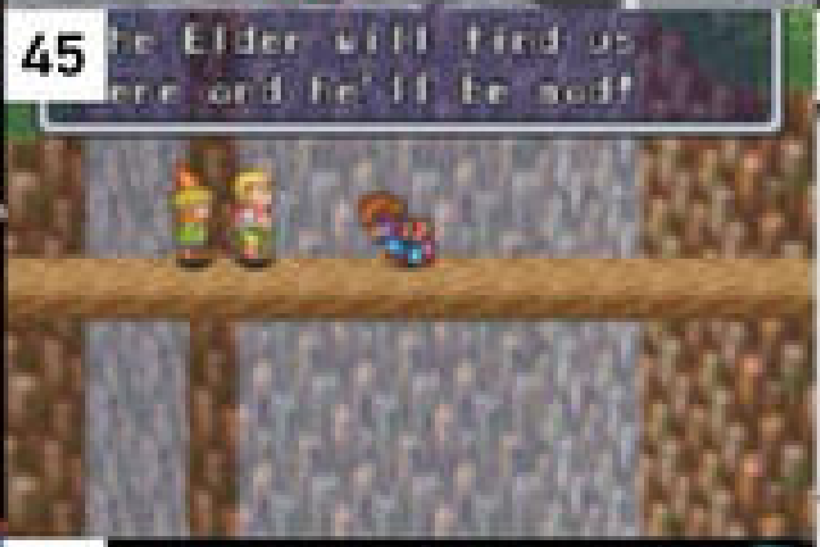
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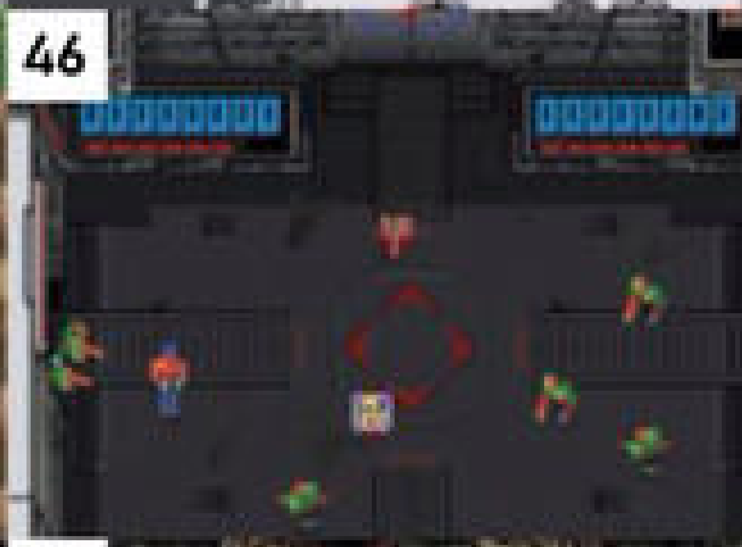
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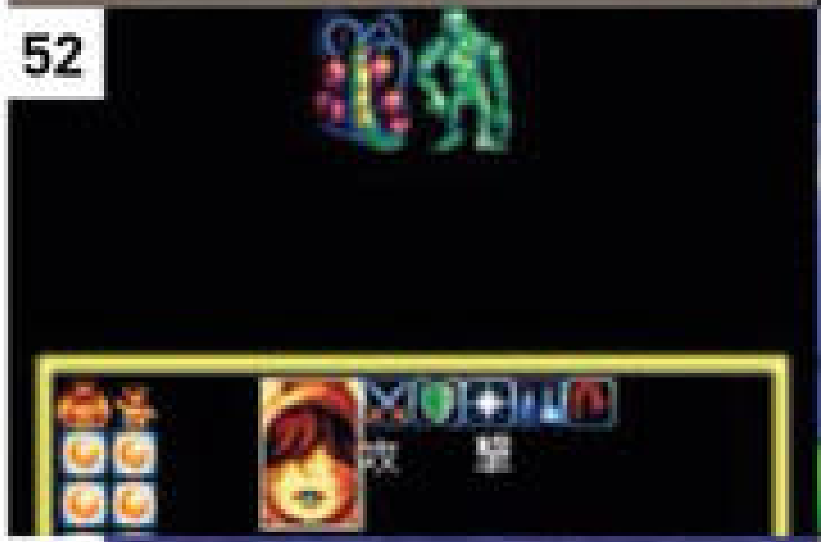
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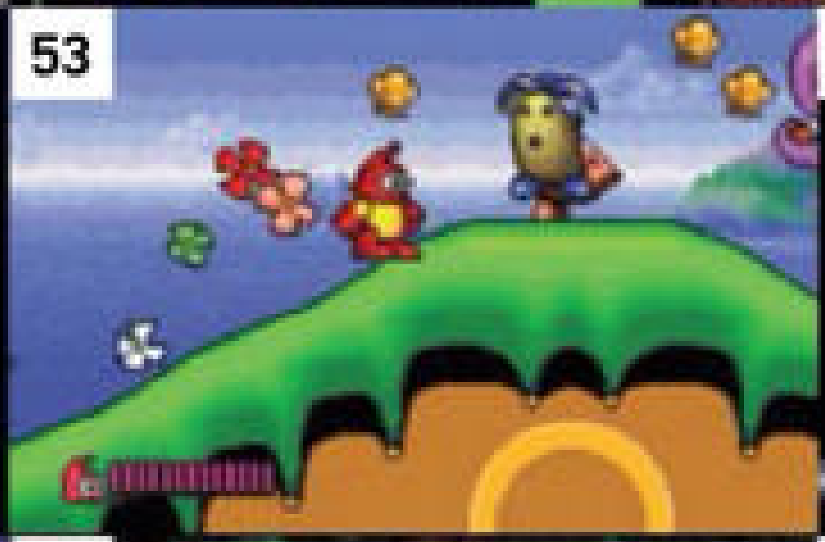
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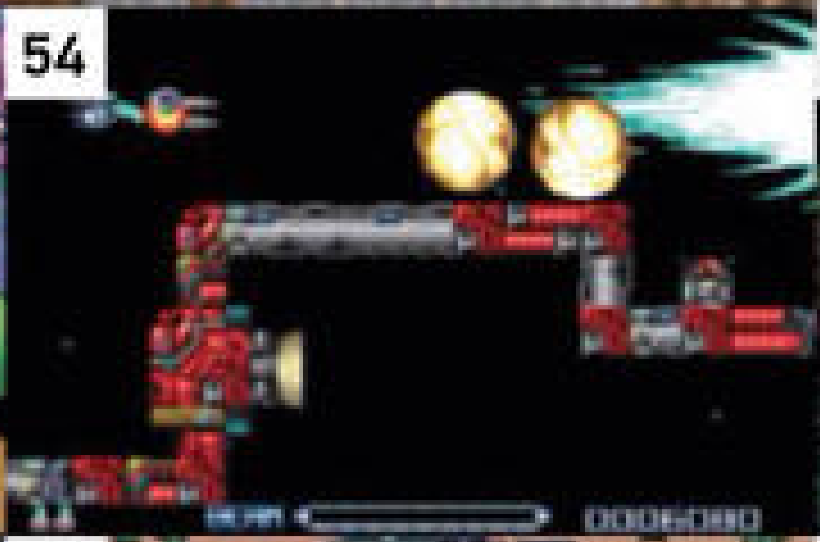
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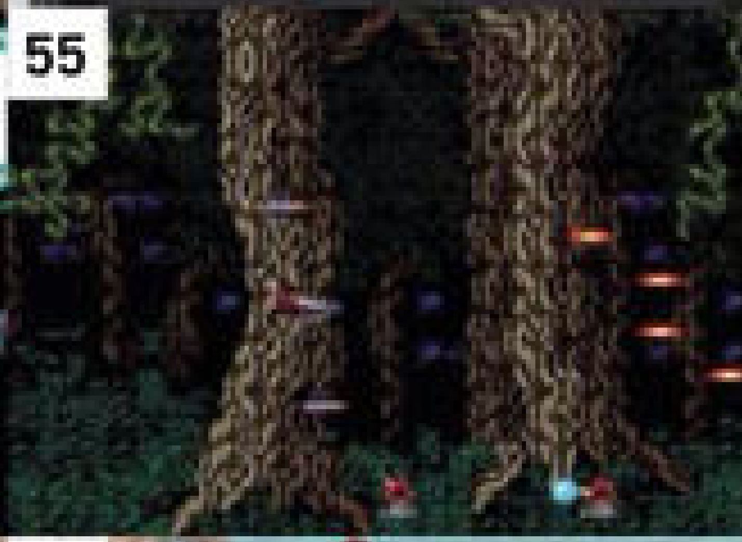
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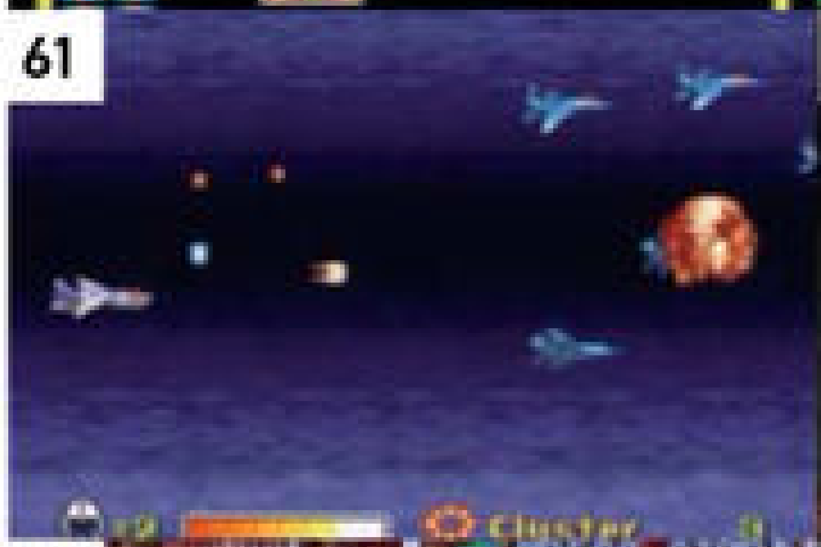
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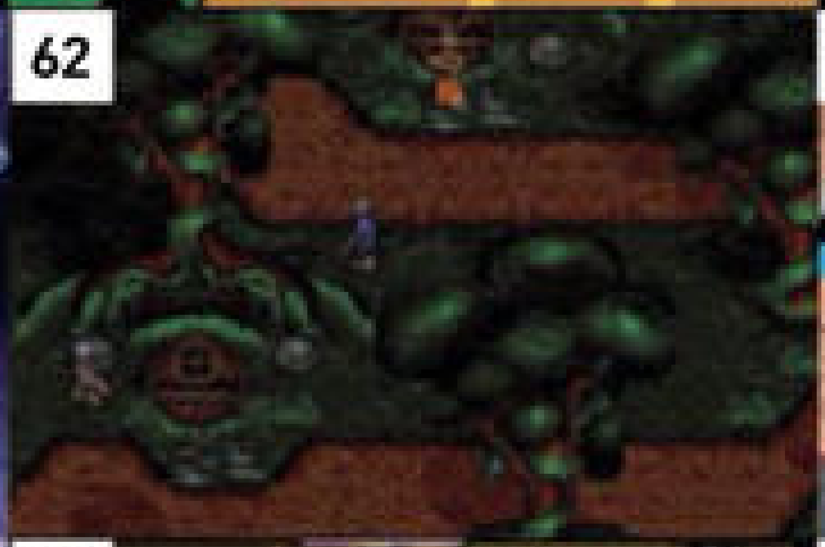
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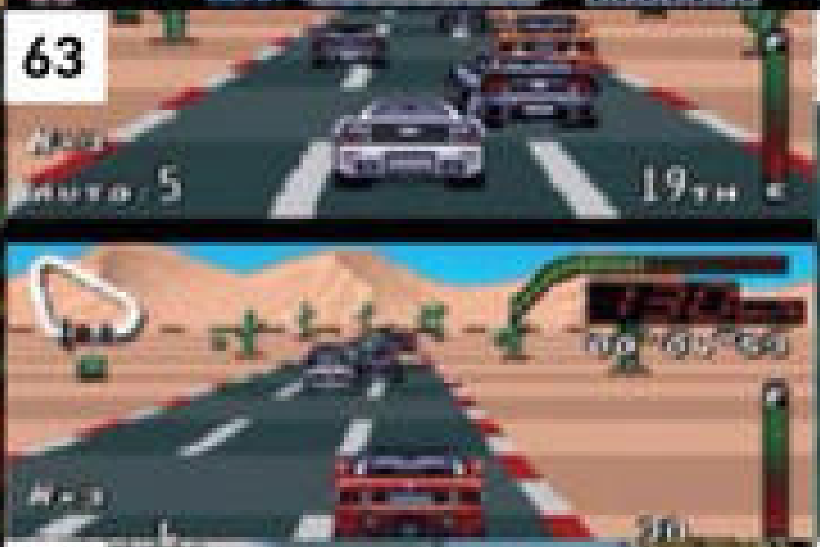
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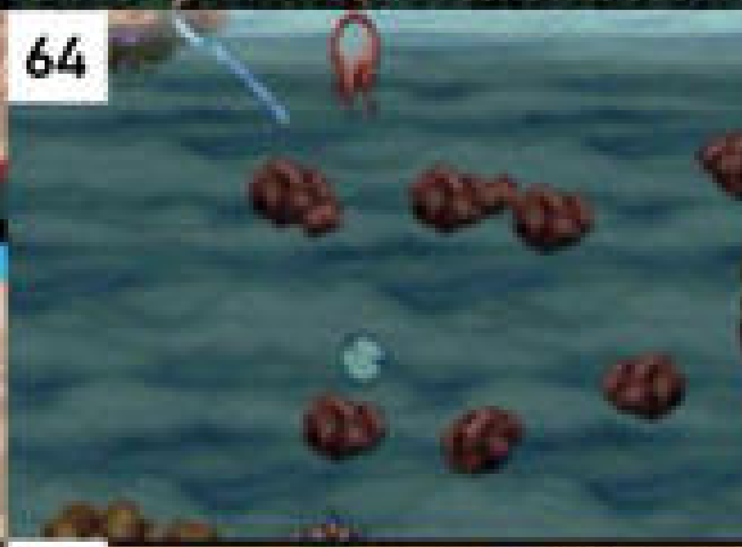
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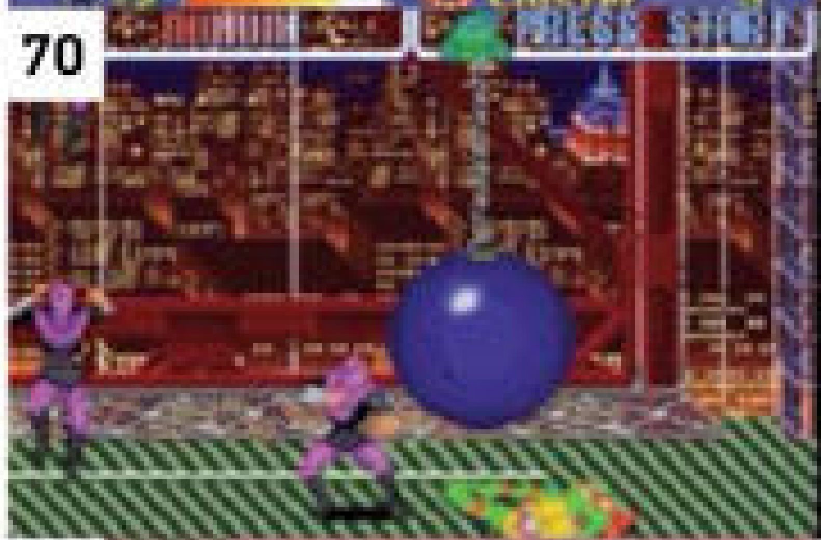
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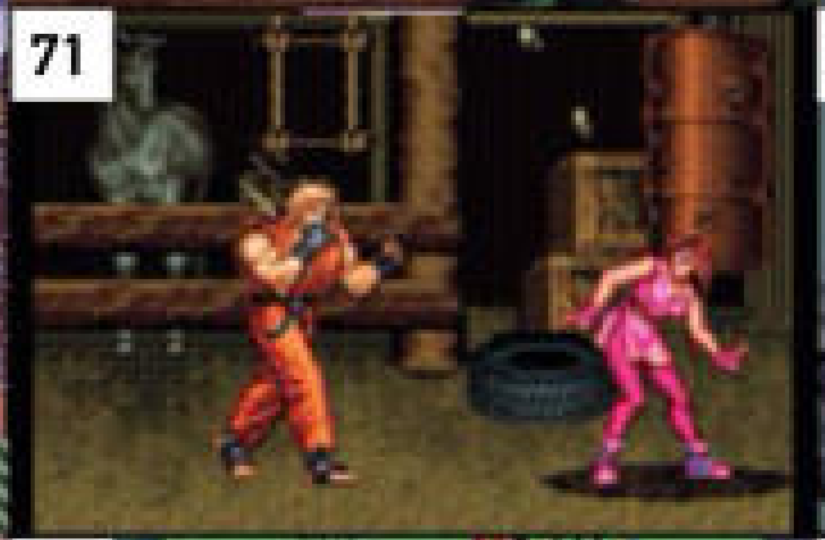
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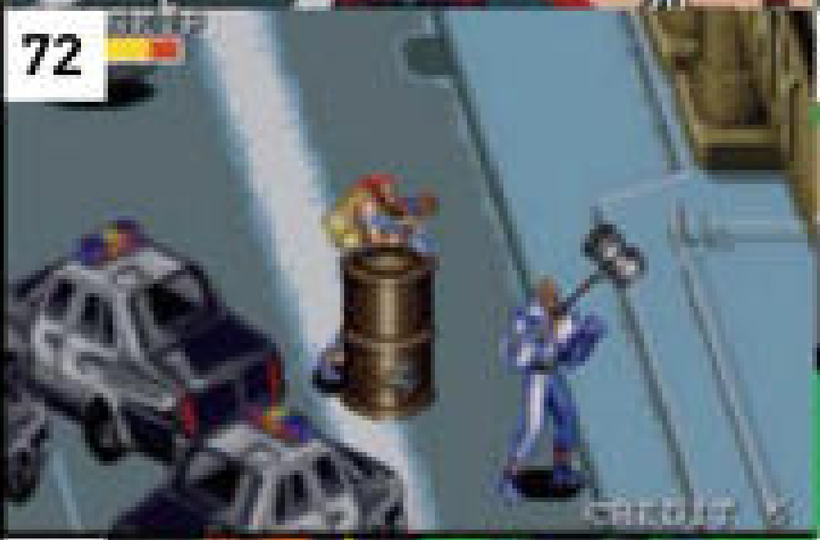
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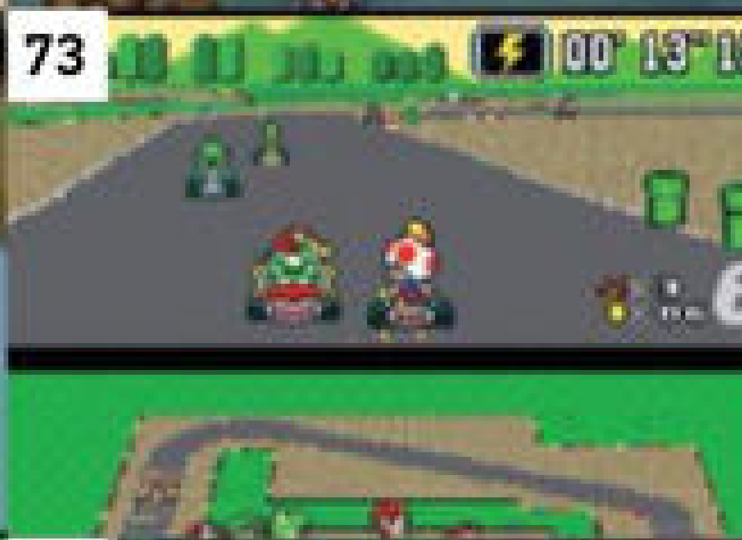
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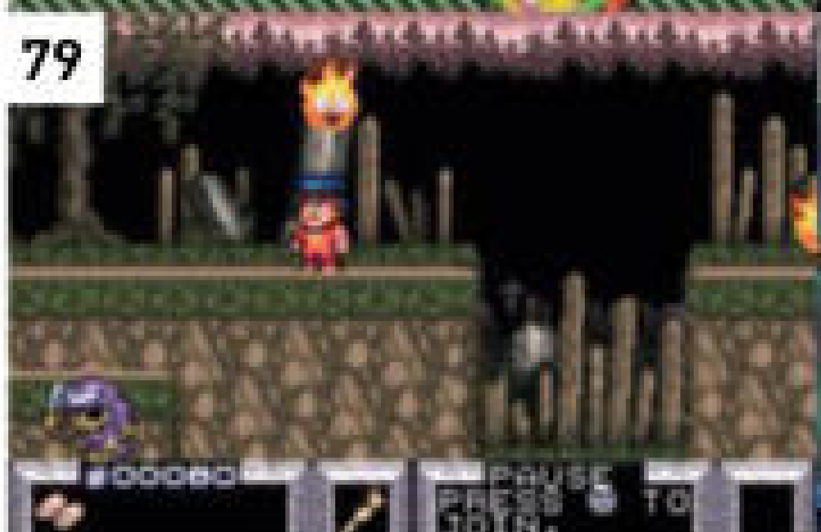
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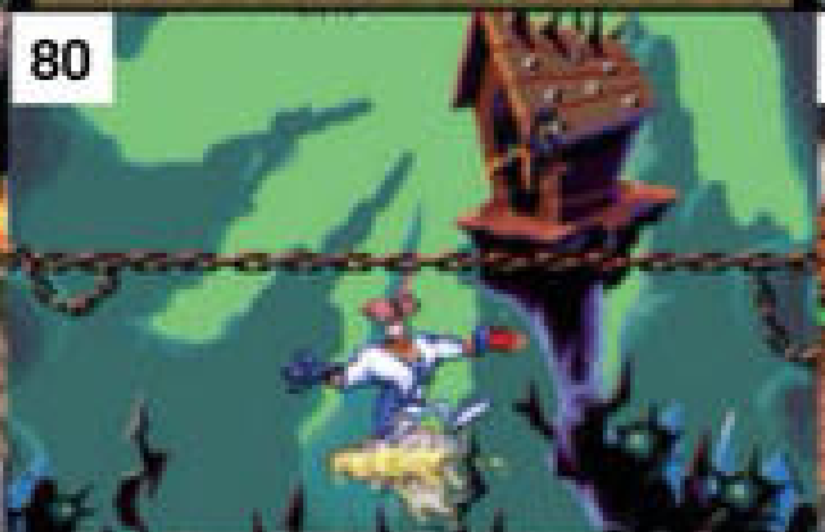
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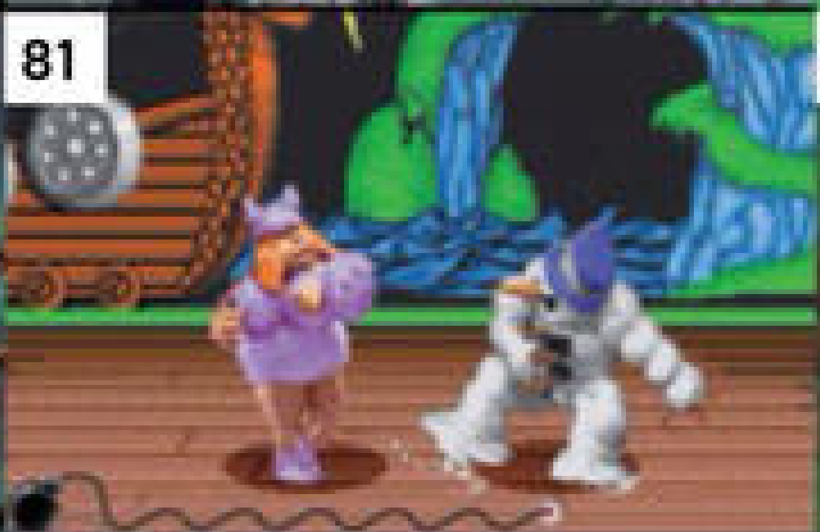
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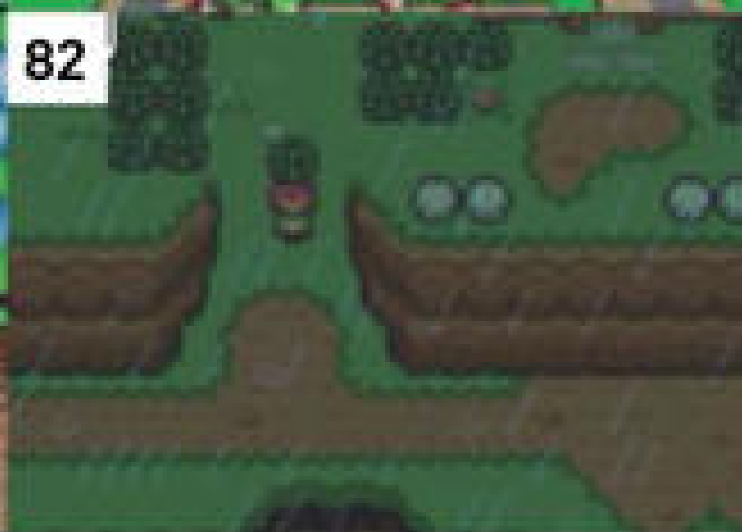
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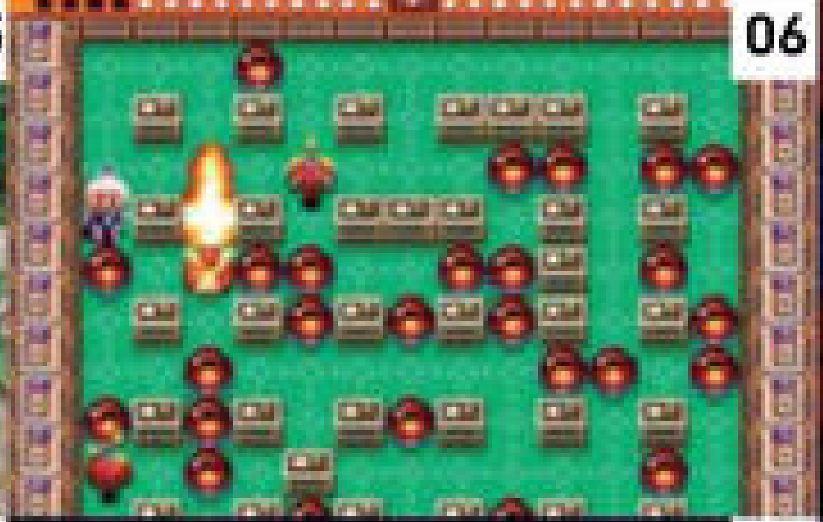
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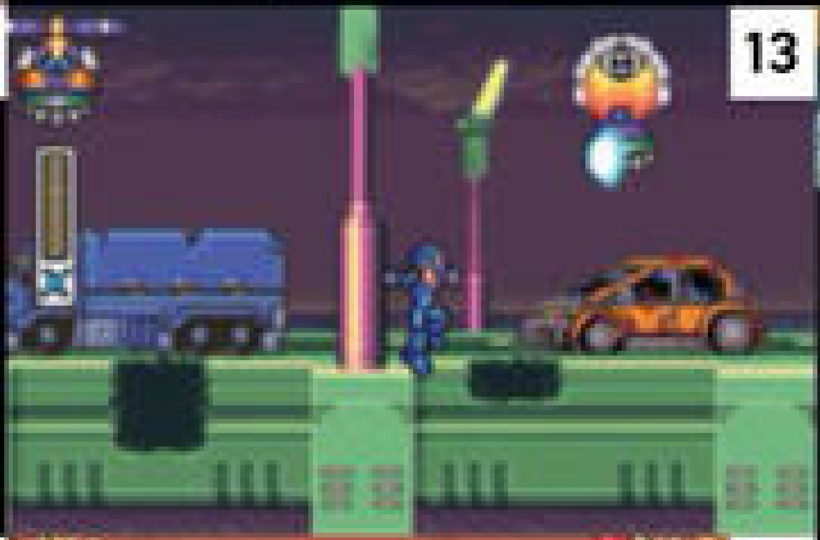
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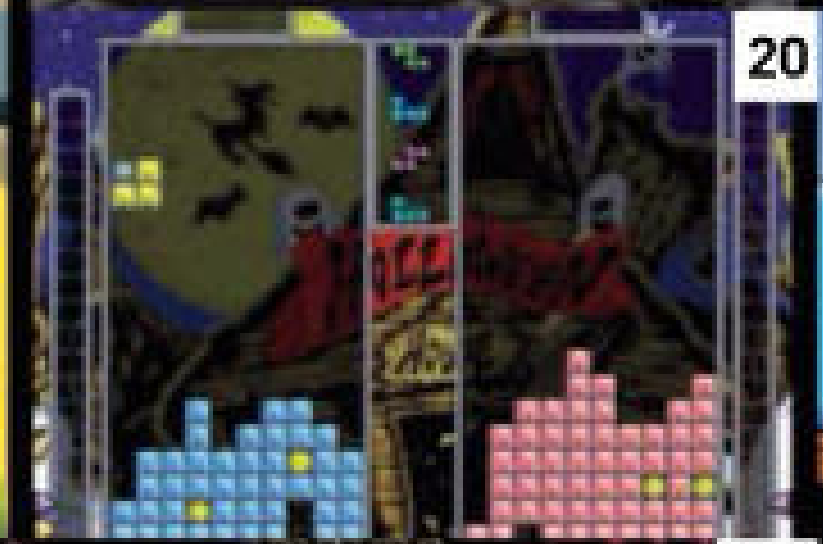
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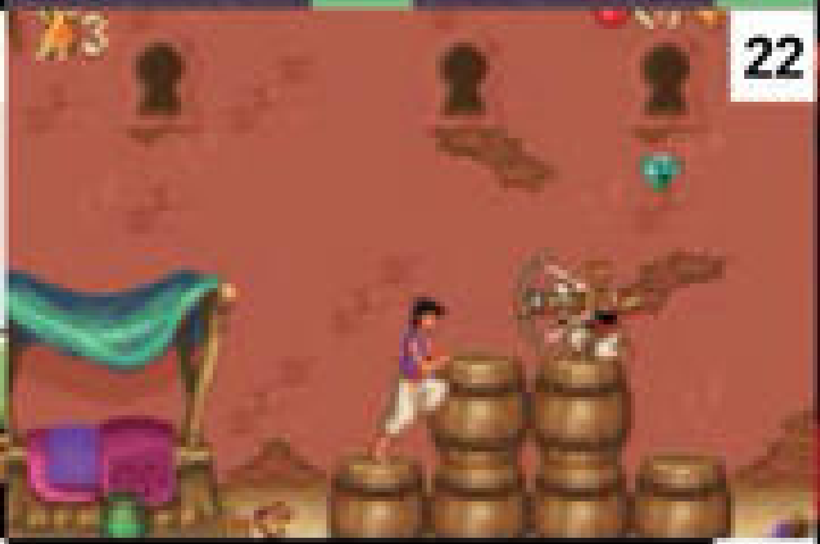
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The village is engulfed
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circo pon
HARBORLAND
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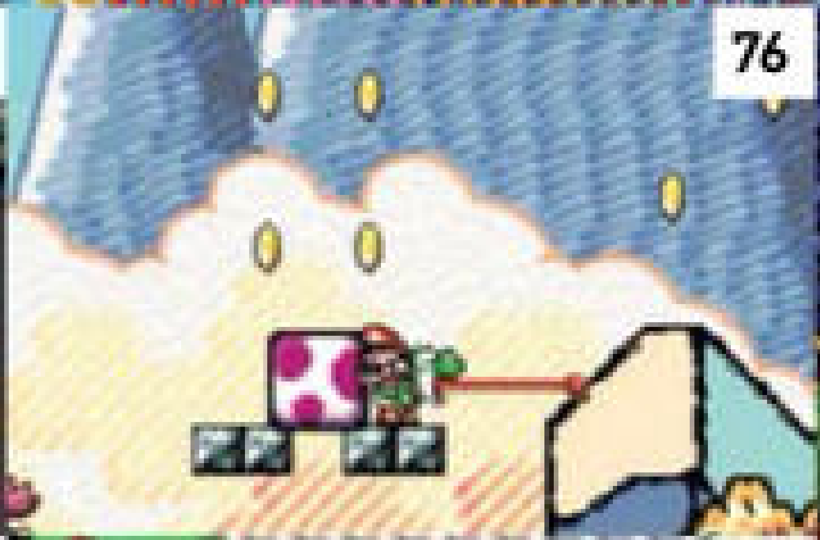
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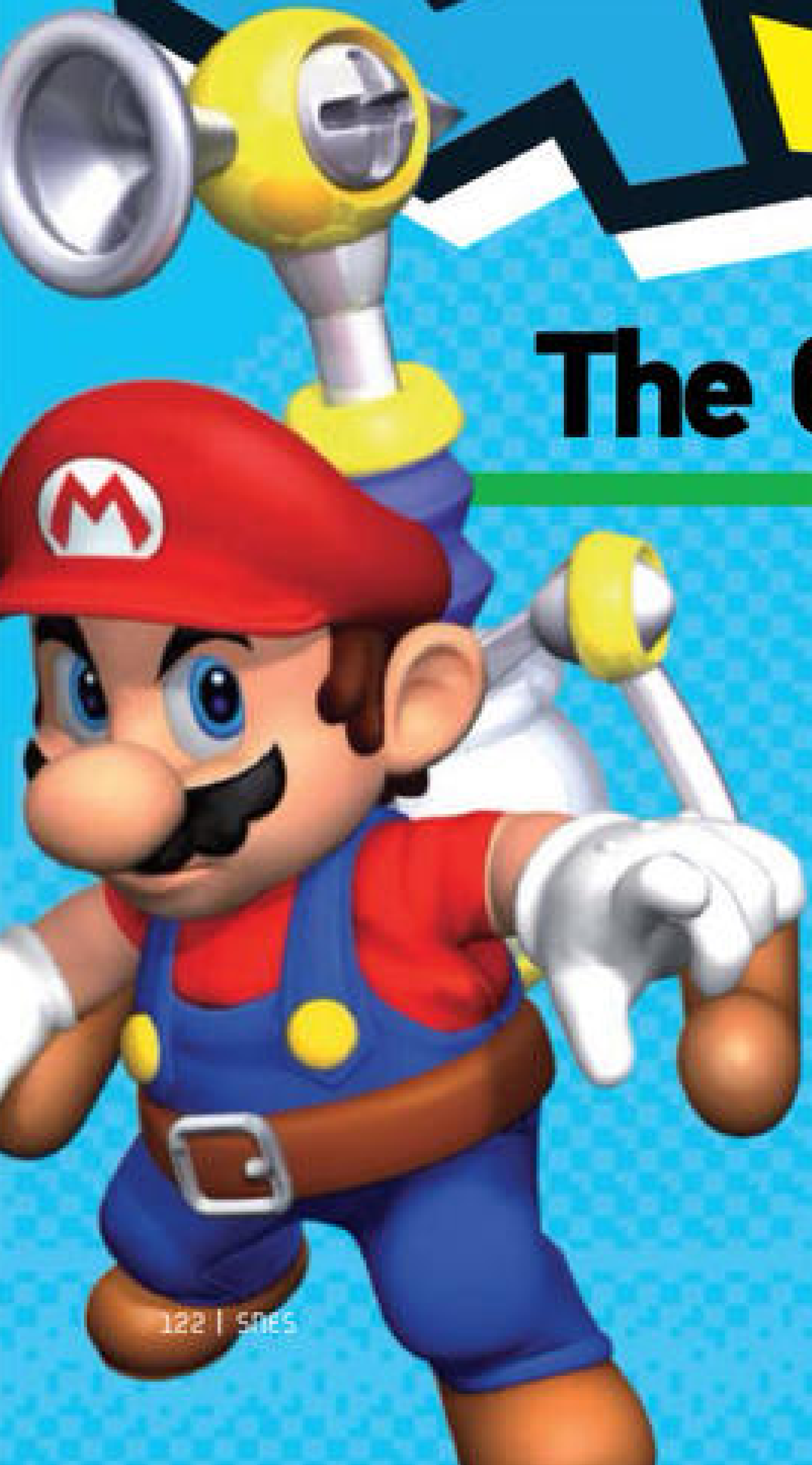
RESTAURANT

MR. VIDEO GAME

The Complete History of Mario

Mario has become one of the most recognisable videogame mascots of all time and has starred in two of the Super Nintendo's best platformers. With that in mind we felt it was only fair that we looked back at his many gaming achievements



To fully appreciate why Mario is still the videogame industry's most recognised, popular and enduring character, you have to look back to the early days of videogames. Mario remains the poster child for a time where everything about them felt fresh, innovative and new, and these newfangled virtual worlds sought only to be linked to ours through the computers and consoles that projected them and the talented visionaries who imagined them. With realism and trends now sitting where fun and creativity once ruled, today's industry is looking a much different place to one that Nintendo was helping rebuild back in the Eighties.

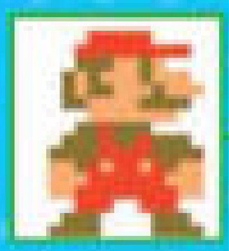
With every familiar-looking sandbox RPG-lite shooter that finds release, it becomes ever apparent that this industry has, in many ways, started to fold in on itself. The insane budgets required to build the games of today mean that now only a small handful of developers and publishers have the financial means to call the shots, game genres seem to be melding together, and despite now being able to utilise gazillions of colours, games are looking a little less colourful. Why the Wii currently stands as the triumphant console of this generation, and *Super Mario Galaxy 2* has scooped universal acclaim, should be obvious to anyone who enjoyed playing videogames throughout the Eighties and Nineties. Nintendo has proven, once again, that fun and creativity are king.

It's for this reason why most gamers can instantly recall the first time they ever saw Mario in action. He takes them back to an evergreen era for videogames, a time with which he has now become synonymous. For many of you reading this, we suspect that your first experience came from playing *Donkey Kong* in arcades, or on home computers and consoles. At this inaugural point in his career, Mario was known by the more literal-sounding name of Jumpman, played a bit of an antihero, and worked as a carpenter instead of the heroic plumber we all know him as today. However, while Mario's personality, name and occupation would come to change quite quickly following his gaming debut in 1981, the distinct look of the character was settled on almost immediately by his creator, Shigeru Miyamoto, and has only really ever been refined, never changed, over the years.

As was the practice in the early days of game design, Mario was borne out from the technical limitations of his time. The character was given his signature flat cap owing to the fact that it would save Miyamoto the headache of animating hair, a large nose to make him look instantly more human, bright red coveralls to help him stand out against *Donkey Kong*'s dark backgrounds, and a moustache instead of a mouth for similar reasons. But Mario's creation also came about through an

Super Mario Moments

1985
SUPER MARIO BROS



1986
SUPER MARIO BROS THE LOST LEVELS

1988 (USA)
SUPER MARIO BROS 2

1988
SUPER MARIO BROS 3

1989
SUPER MARIO LAND

1990
SUPER MARIO WORLD

1995
SUPER MARIO WORLD 2: YOSHIS ISLAND

1996
SUPER MARIO 64

2002
SUPER MARIO SUNSHINE

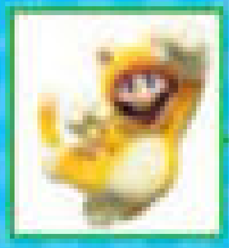
2006
NEW SUPER MARIO BROS

2007
SUPER MARIO GALAXY

2009
NEW SUPER MARIO BROS WII

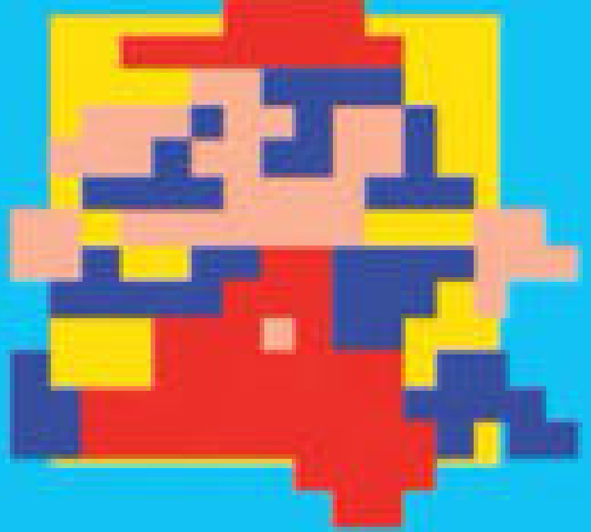
2011
SUPER MARIO 3D LAND

2013
SUPER MARIO 3D WORLD



Professions of a Plumber

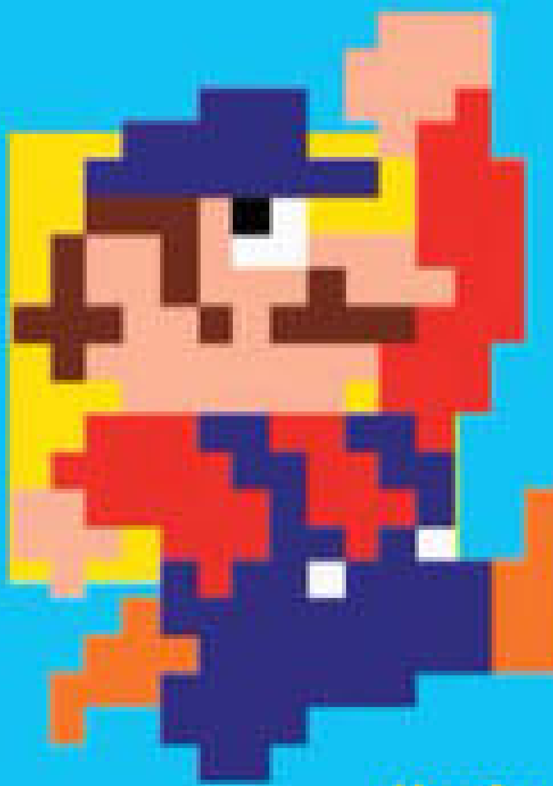
The versatile hero has appeared in a string of occupational cameos for Nintendo over the years…



Carpenter

Donkey Kong 1981

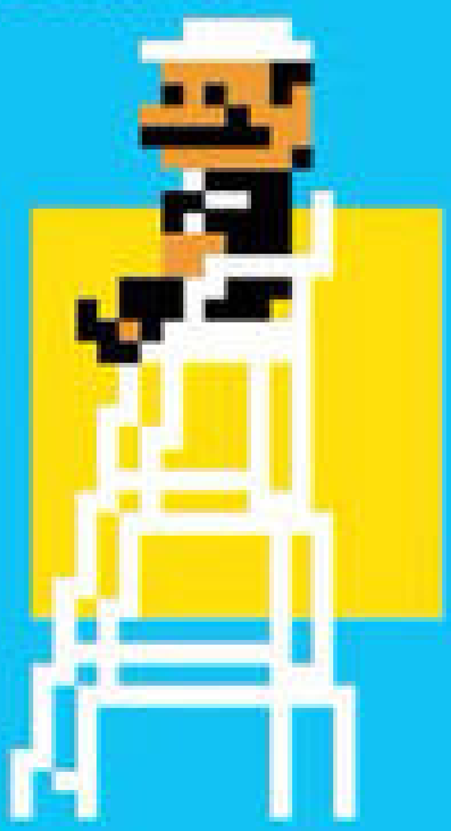
■ Mario's first ever job was as a mallet-wielding carpenter in *Donkey Kong*. It's likely that his profession was inspired by the everyman-type scenarios on which Nintendo based many of its Game & Watch titles.



Plumber

Mario Bros 1983

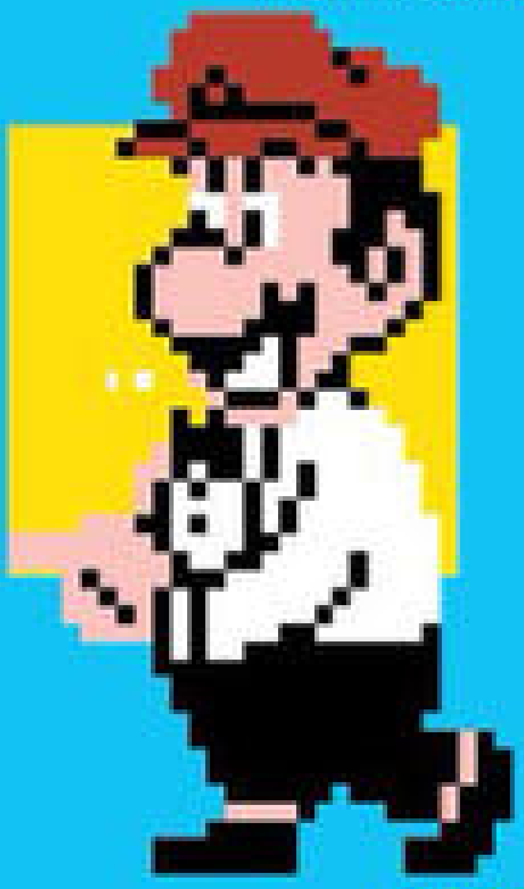
■ After a two-year stint working as a carpenter, Mario turned his talents to plumbing – as well as the odd bit of pest extermination too – for *Mario Bros*. He kept the role for the subsequent *Super Mario Bros* series.



Umpire

Tennis 1984

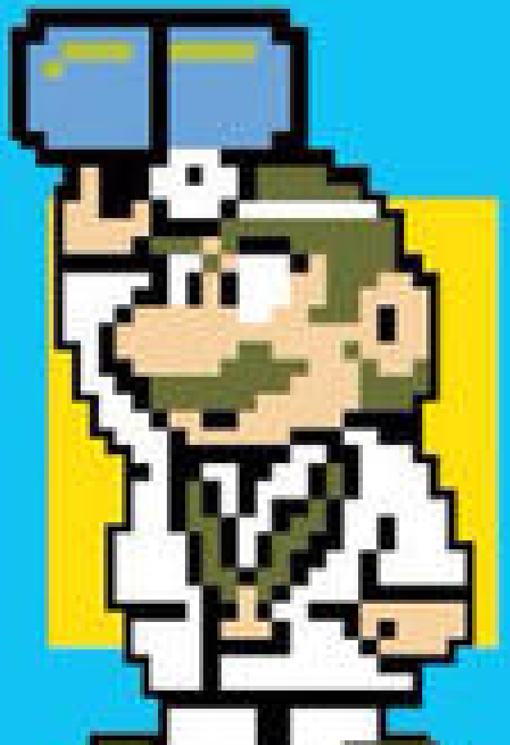
■ Mario earned extra cash at weekends working as a tennis umpire. Later in life he decided to take up the sport himself when he realised that more money was to be had playing than interfering.



Referee

Punch-Out!! 1987

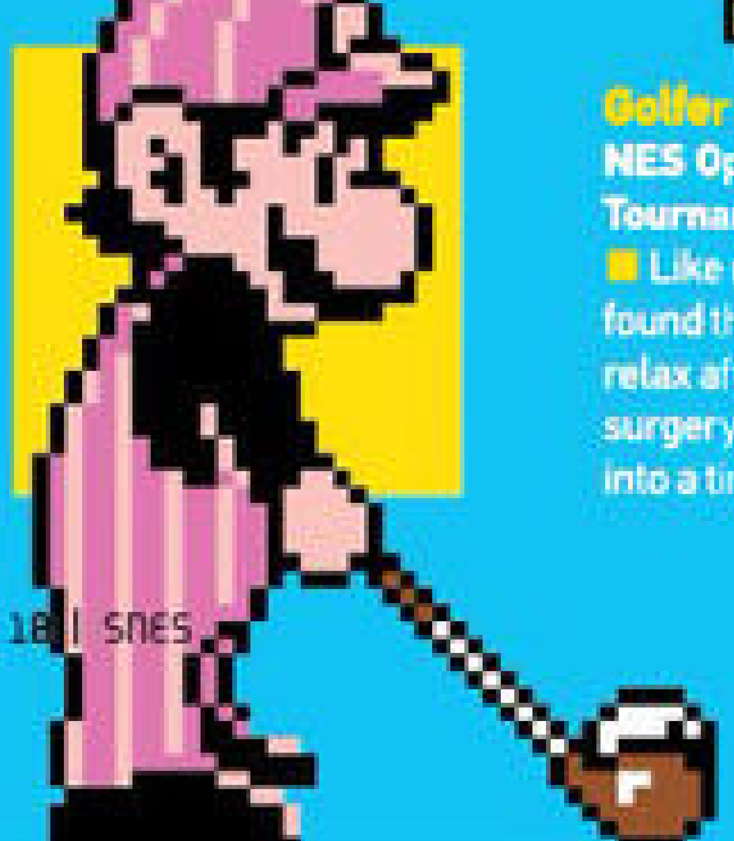
■ Following a successful spell as a tennis umpire, Mario caught the eye of the Nintendo Boxing Commission and was approached to work as a referee in the Famicom/NES version of *Punch-Out!!*.



Doctor

Dr Mario 1990

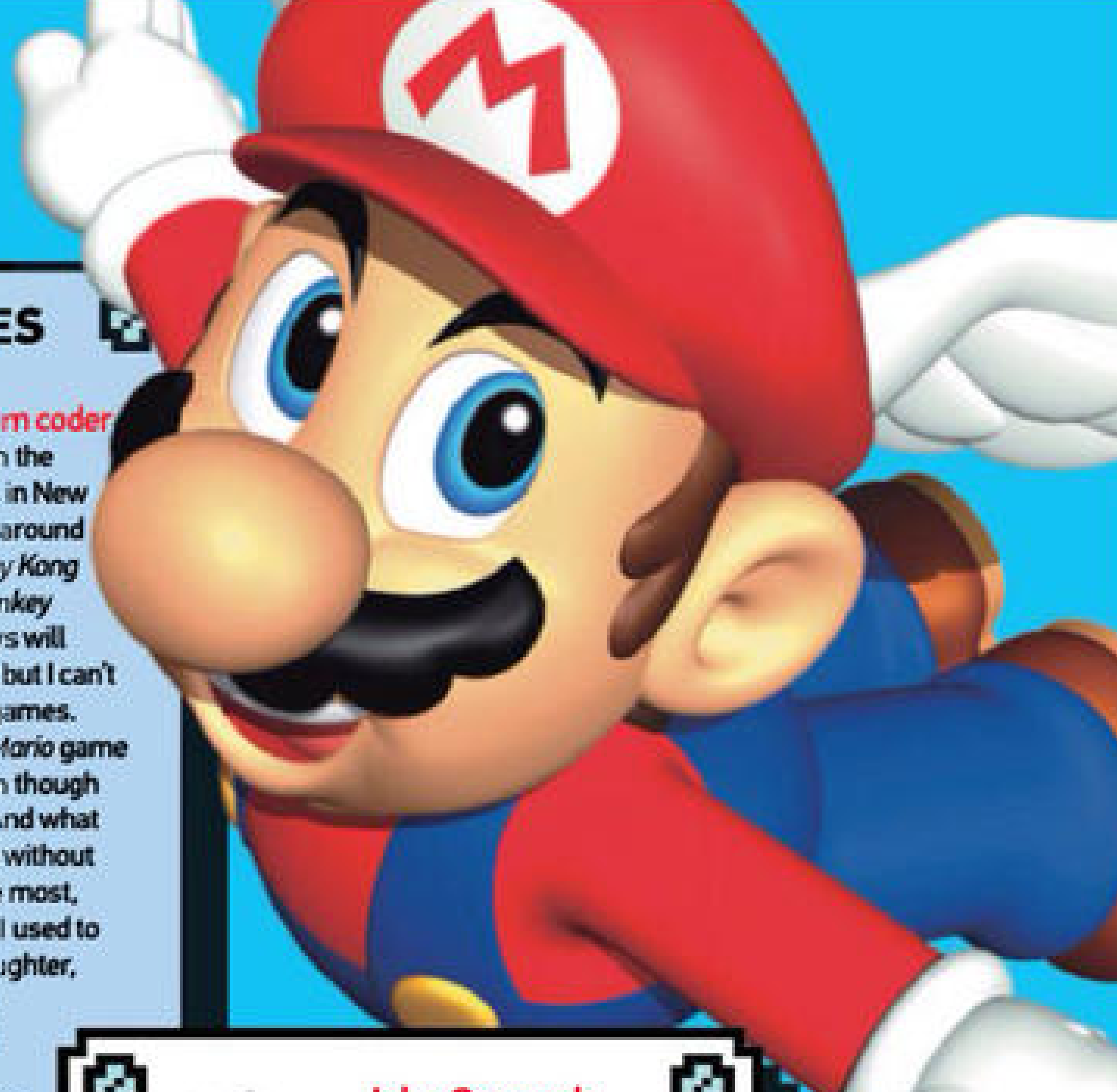
■ Making a mint working as a boxing ref, Mario left labouring to go to medical school. It took him just two years to complete his doctorate – earning him a place in *Guinness World Records*.



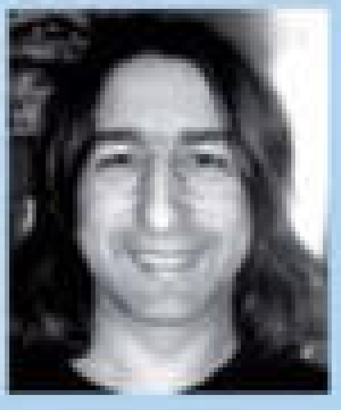
Golfer

NES Open Tournament Golf 1991

■ Like most doctors, Mario found that the best way to relax after a busy day in surgery was to smash a ball into a tiny hole.



MARIO MEMORIES



Jim Bagley

Classic Spectrum coder

I first saw Mario in the local arcade halls in New Brighton roughly around 1981 when *Donkey Kong* was released. *Donkey Kong* is and always will be a classic, and a great game to boot, but I can't help but admire so many other *Mario* games. *Super Mario Bros* is another fantastic *Mario* game that even to this day I like to play – even though my nephew completed it before I did! And what favourite *Mario* list would be complete without *Mario Kart*? I loved the N64 version the most, because my nephew, niece, sister and I used to play it at the weekends with riotous laughter, especially when zapping someone on the jump in Wario Stadium. And I can't go without saying *New Super Mario Bros*. I also loved it, again, because of the original features, like being able to grow huge and sprint through the level. Out of those four, those being my favourites, if I had to choose one… I'm not sure I can! They all have a huge place in my heart. Why has Mario remained so enduring? Well because he's constantly re-inventing himself, changing with the times, and because Shigeru Miyamoto is simply a genius.

John Carmack

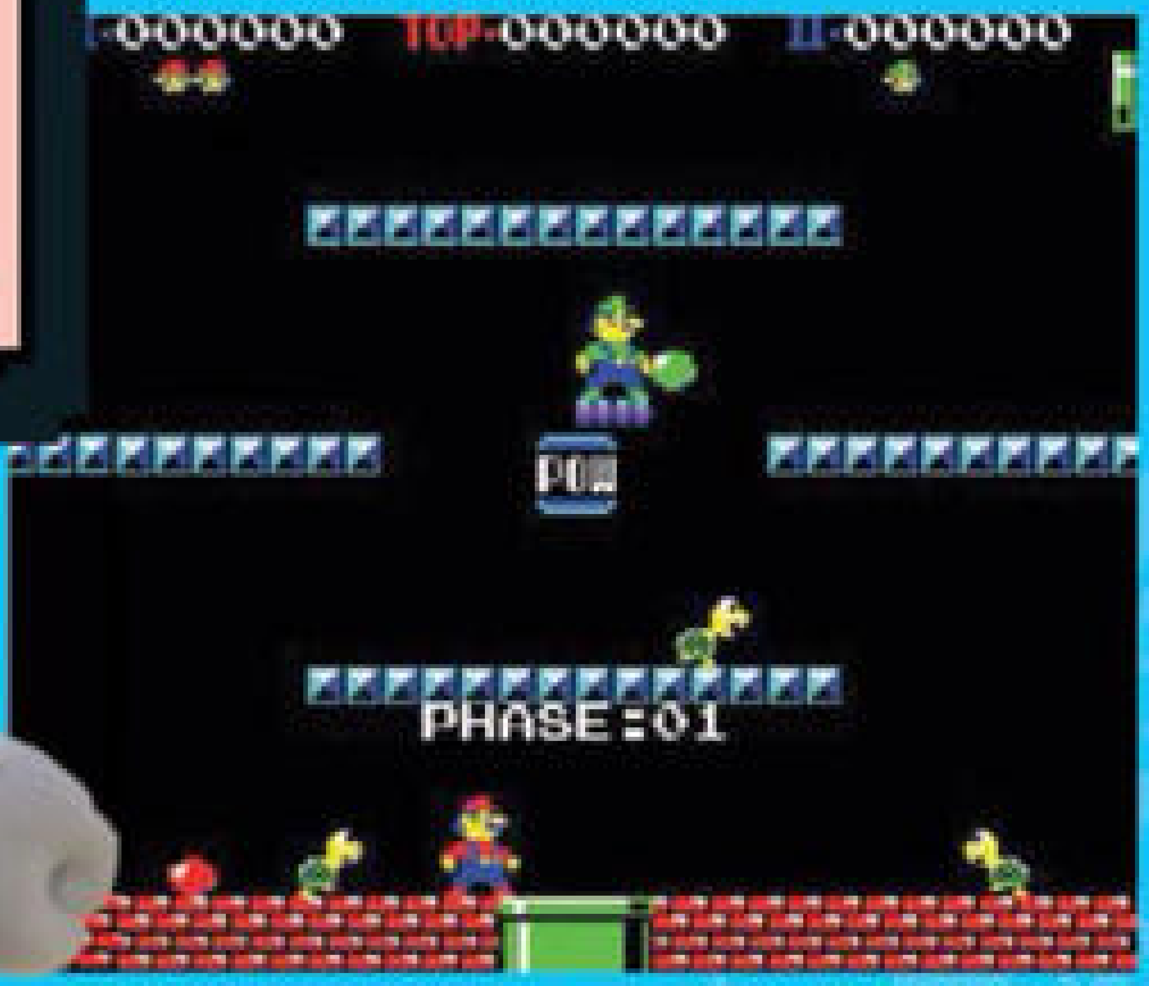
Co-Founder id Software

I have followed Mario since the *Donkey Kong* days, and id Software was pretty much launched on the merits of an internal clone of *Super Mario Bros 3*. I was away for a while after *Super Mario 64*, but the last few years with my son have brought me back into the fold – we just collected our 66th star on *Super Mario Galaxy 2* last night, and we have gone back through all the old games. Still fun after all these years. Domo arigato, Miyamoto-san!

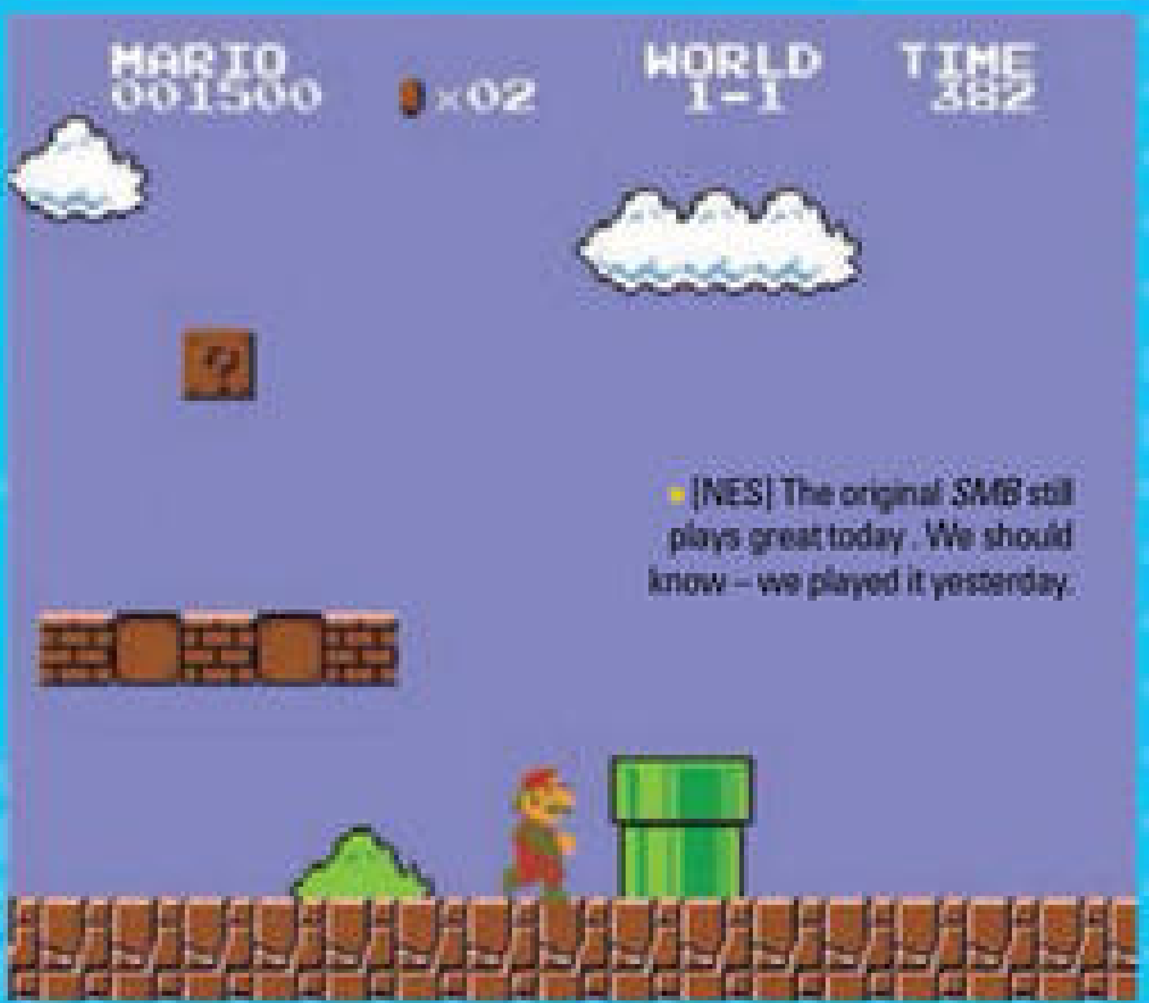
Kevin Toms

Creator of Football Manager

I remember my first recollection of Mario being on the original Nintendo cartridge machine. Squat, cute character, red hat comes to mind. Probably I would go for *Mario Kart* on the Nintendo 64 as my *Mario* game. His lasting appeal is down to the personality he puts across: an upbeat, likable, jolly man. Most people would get on with someone like that. So he annoys no one!

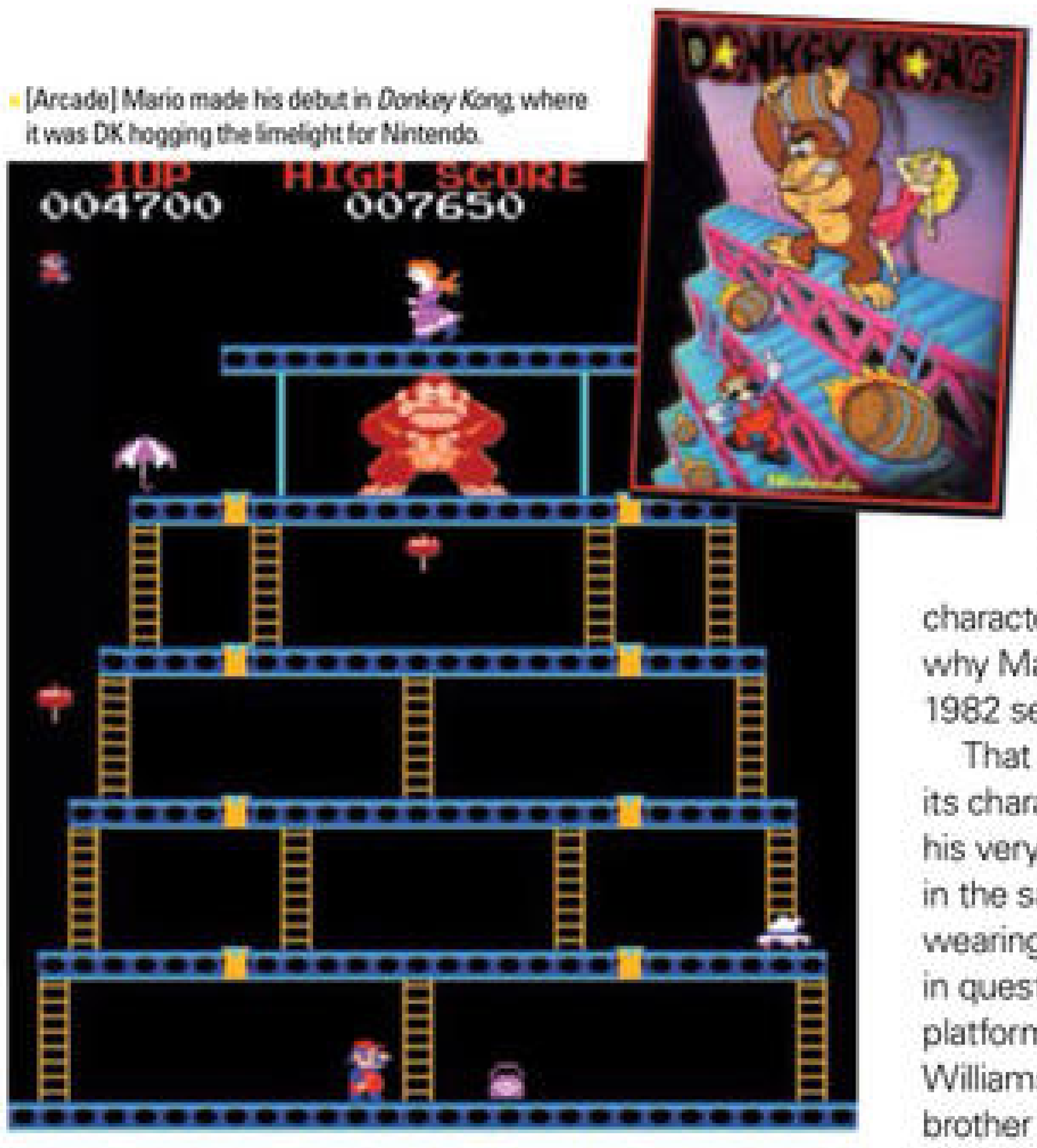


■ [PC-88] Hudson Soft released two peculiar variants of *Mario Bros* for Japanese home computers.



■ [NES] The original *SMB* still plays great today . We should know – we played it yesterday.

[Arcade] Mario made his debut in *Donkey Kong*, where it was DK hogging the limelight for Nintendo.



element of luck and good fortune – although it probably didn't seem that way to Nintendo at the time.

'I'll save yer, lady!'

Before *Donkey Kong* was even considered, Shigeru Miyamoto had aims to create a new arcade game starring the characters from the popular King Features Syndicate cartoon, *Popeye*. But when Nintendo failed to obtain the licence, Miyamoto was forced to come up with three central characters of his own. And, after taking pretty obvious inspiration from the 1933 stop-motion monster classic, *King Kong*, he came up with the characters Jumpman, Lady and Donkey Kong to substitute the roles of Popeye, Olive Oyl and Bluto, respectively.

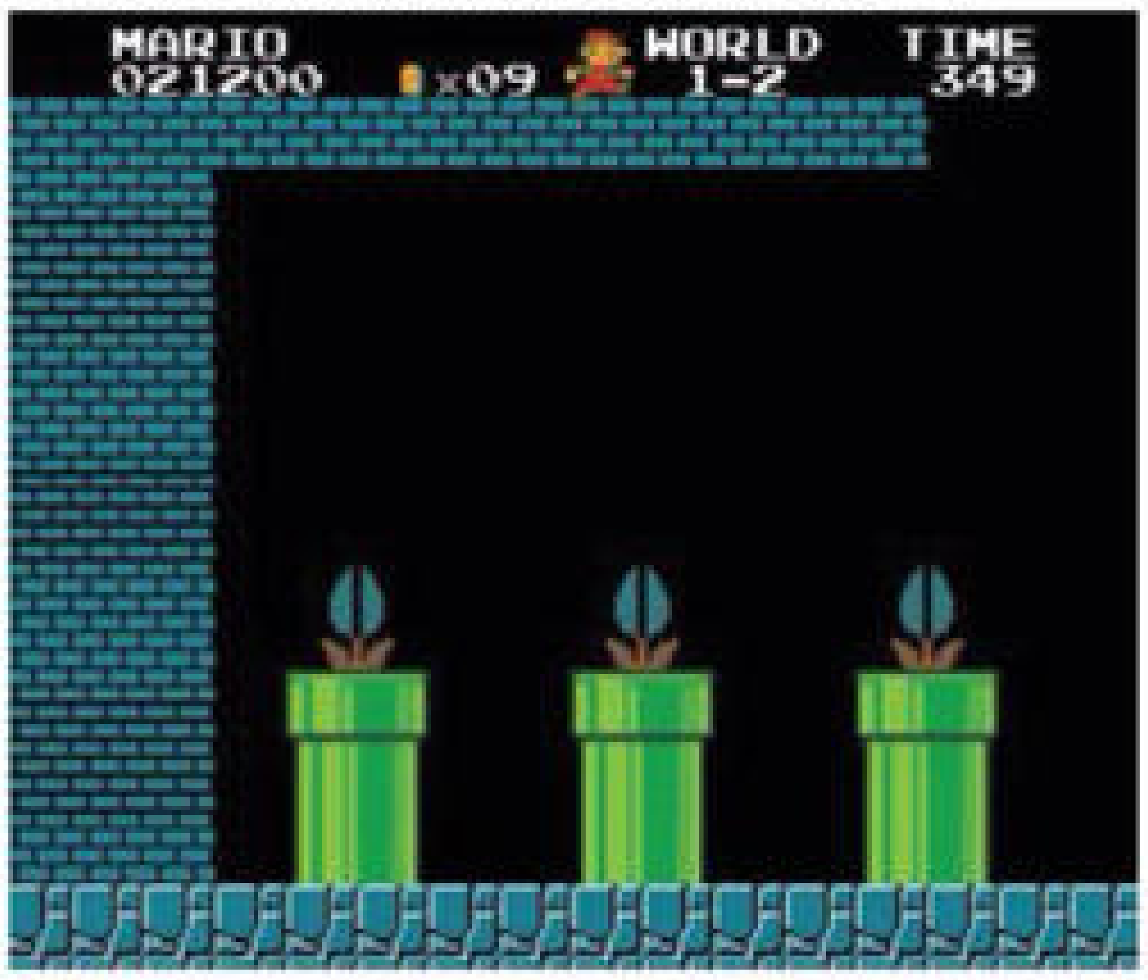
When the time came for *Donkey Kong* to ship to North America, however, it was decided that Jumpman should be renamed during the localisation process. Even then, Nintendo's intention was to turn Mario into a mascot-type character by having him appear in many of Miyamoto's subsequent videogames. With this idea in mind, the first new name that Nintendo would settle on for Jumpman was 'Mr Video'. It was a name clearly derived from Nintendo's first ever gaming mascot, Mr Game & Watch.

However, in what became one of the videogame industry's most bizarre anecdotes, Jumpman's name would change once again. The tale goes that, at the time when Nintendo of America (NOA) was trying to gain a foothold in North America, it was renting a warehouse from an Italian construction tycoon named Mario Segale. Segale was said to have looked remarkably similar to Jumpman, and when NOA's president at the time, Minoru Arakawa, realised the coincidence, Jumpman was nicknamed Mario and the name stuck. What makes the story all the more ironic is the fact that Mario Segale's business was construction, an industry that played a prominent role in the look of *Donkey Kong*'s stages. We can neither confirm nor deny whether Segale once owned a giant gorilla that he would occasionally mistreat, though we're guessing that it was highly unlikely.

With the character renamed, Lady rechristened Pauline, and the localisation process complete, Nintendo pushed *Donkey Kong* out onto the US market, where it became a huge success. And with the millions of dollars it earned, the company was able to fund development of its first true videogame console, the Famicom. But it was Donkey Kong, not Mario, who was gaining the most celebrity for Nintendo. Despite the fact that the big dumb ape was assigned the role of big dumb antagonist in *Donkey Kong*, his domineering presence and cartoon qualities made him a clear standout character in the game. And it is perhaps for this reason why Mario was then made to play villain in the game's 1982 sequel, *Donkey Kong Jr.*

That said, Nintendo, obviously not wanting to turn its character into an out-and-out baddie, did give Mario his very own game in the same year, plonking him back in the saddle of hero and gifting him a green coverall-wearing brother called Luigi into the bargain. The game in question, *Mario Bros*, was a single-screen action platformer that looked and played similar to the earlier Williams arcade game *Joust*. It saw Mario and his brother battle through 'phases' of enemy attacks inside a New York sewer, and was the first game to ever depict the brothers as plumbers – it's believed that this was done simply to explain the game's culvert setting. However, with its premise finding the pair trying to prevent an infestation of insect and reptilian pests escaping into the city, the brothers are clearly acting more like exterminators in the game. Nevertheless, as well as portraying the brothers as plumbers, *Mario Bros* also introduced a few common enemy types too, such as Shellcreepers – a precursor to Koopa Troopas – and the annoying spike-shelled foes, the Spinies. It also established the idea of having the brothers collect coins through bonus rounds, as well as the concept of brick-punching and unconscious-enemy toe-punting, all of which would become staples of the *Mario* series.

[NES] Who can forget this trick in World 1-2? Who was it that said cheating doesn't pay? Someone who'd never played *Super Mario Bros*, clearly.



Mario Bros received a lukewarm arcade reception, certainly nothing in the same league as *Donkey Kong*, but later proved to be a popular release for the NES in North America. Two variants of the game were also developed by Hudson Soft, under licence from Nintendo. Released exclusively on Japanese home computers, the games featured all-new original stages and gameplay mechanics. The first, *Mario Bros Special*, was an interesting update of the original game that saw players having to fight their way to exit points at the top of each stage, while the second title, *Punch Ball Mario Bros*, was a quirky dodgeball-inspired iteration that saw the brothers punching balls at their subterranean foes and hitting switches. Hudson Soft also later released its own version of *Super Mario Bros*. Titled *Super Mario Bros Special*, this unfairly punishing home computer version featured all-new levels, hair-pulling level design and maddening flick-screen scrolling. In fact, the dodgy scrolling mars the experience so much that it shows just how important a factor scrolling actually played in *Super Mario Bros*' ultimate success.

But we're jumping ahead of ourselves a bit here, as Mario hadn't quite gone 'super' just yet. In fact, while it's debatable that Miyamoto dabbled with the idea of giving Mario enhanced powers in *Mario Bros* by finally giving him the ability to survive a fall – he wasn't capable of bending his knees in *Donkey Kong* – it wasn't really until the release of *Super Mario Bros* in 1985 that the legendary game designer gave his creation real super powers. Before reaching this watershed moment, though, the character could be seen busily living up to his 'Mr Video' duties. The multipurpose butterball could be seen popping up in a bonus stage in the NES game *Pinball* that same year, guest appearing as an unshaven umpire in *Tennis* (1984), and influencing the look of *Golf*'s (1984) moustachioed golfer Ossan, a character

MARIO MEMORIES

Eugene Jarvis

Arcade legend

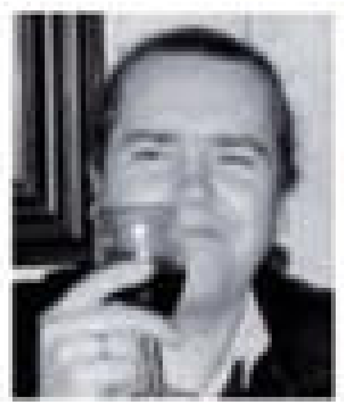
My first recollection of Mario was in *Donkey Kong*. The character was ridiculous. Why am I a carpenter trying to rescue a princess from King Kong? *Super Mario Bros* is the greatest videogame of all time. It is etched in my brain like a phosphorescent cattle brand. Mario is the video star. He has been flogged and baked into the collective memory of humanity for 30 years. When the last cockroach is dead he will dance on the grave.

Jamie Woodhouse

Creator of Qwak!

I'm fairly sure my first experience of Mario was *Mario Bros* on the NES; I remember it not scrolling, just a static screen, with lots of turtles that go into pipes in the bottom corners of the screen, then coming out of pipes in the top corners. Characters were all simple, yet fun-looking, with a cutesy round feel to them. I think my all-time favourite *Mario* game is probably *Super Mario Land* on the Game Boy: simple, fun gameplay, not too complicated graphically, and of course, it was portable! I think maybe Mario's appeal is down to the personality of the character; I mean, he's not really a violent kind of dude, is he? And he's only there in the first place because he's trying to sort out the big bad boss or rescue his girlfriend – or was that the other game, the one with the big monkey? So I guess, maybe because he's not too violent, and he's there for a good reason, people maybe relate to that. Also, it can't hurt having the Nintendo marketing department on your side!

MARIO MEMORIES



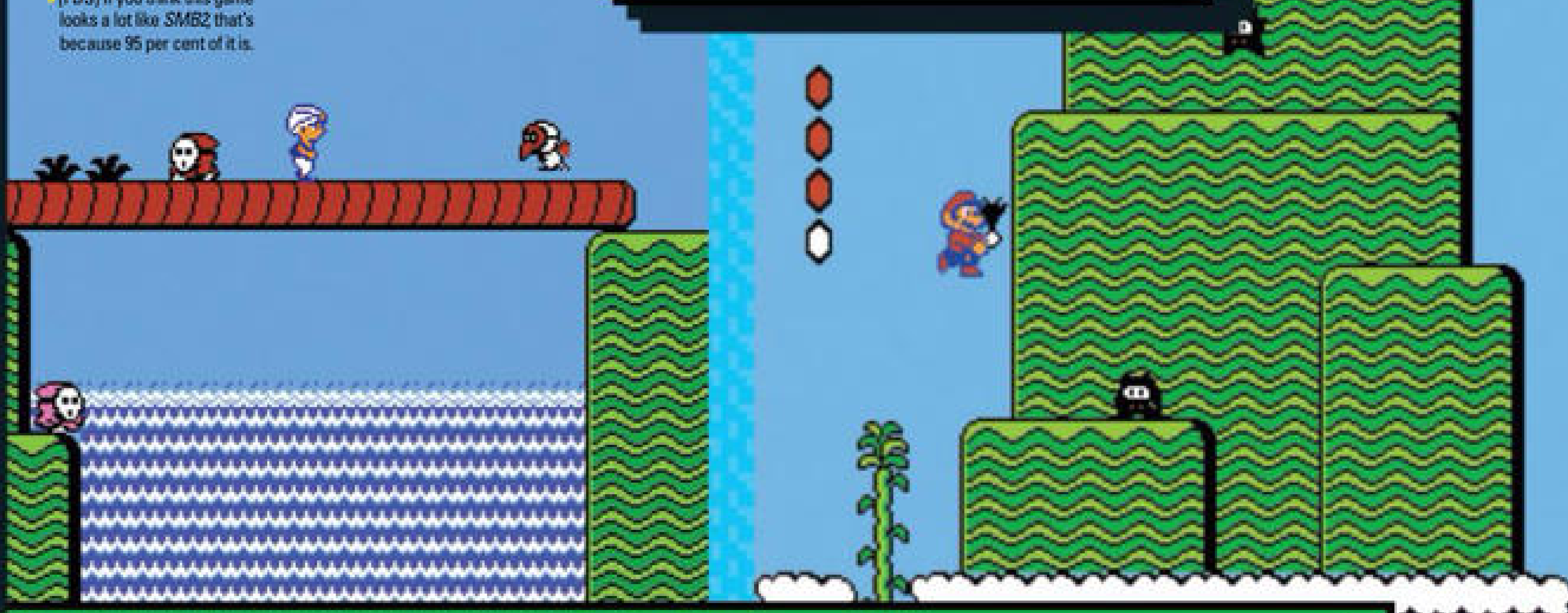
Jon Hare
Co-Founder Sensible Software

First time I saw Mario was *Donkey Kong* in the arcades in about 1980. I didn't focus on the character much, to be honest – nothing that special. I thought the monkey was the best thing in the game. My all-time favourite *Mario* game has to be *Mario Golf* on the N64. It just has the most perfectly tuned learning curve ever. I spent a whole year trying to win every trophy and kept missing the final one by just one shot. Next best titles would be *Mario 64* and *Mario Kart*. I think Mario endures because he is a really good everyman character, funny but not too irritating, and he has an army of fellow characters that add a lot to him. Miyamoto is the only game designer that I look up to.

MARIO MEMORIES

Scott Miller
Founder of Apogee Software

I first remember Mario playing *Donkey Kong*, of course! When I first discovered this game in an arcade I knew it had something special about it, interesting characters, unique gameplay, variety, and it was a deeply polished game. From the get-go I knew it was the start of a new era, but no one could have guessed the staying power of this squatty plumber!



[FDS] If you think this game looks a lot like *SMB2* that's because 95 per cent of it is.

Alex Trowers
Designer of classic Bullfrog games

I suppose the first time I saw Mario in action was in *Super Mario Bros*, but that's only because the Mario in *Donkey Kong* was called Jumpman. I found *SMB* a bit meh – despite the knocking-things-over-from-underneath mechanic and a two-player option, the whole thing felt a little repetitive. I loved *Donkey Kong* in the arcades, though, and the ColecoVision version, which was the scene of some epic high-score battles between my brother, my mum and I. I can also remember a version of *Super Mario 3* on an old Nintendo Play Choice 10 machine in a local kebab shop. That was entertaining. Suddenly Mario could do all manner of interesting things and that was quite appealing. My favourite *Mario* game is a toss-up between *Super Mario World* on the Super Famicom and *Super Mario 64* on the N64. Some guys from Imagineer brought a Super Famicom over around the time of the Japanese launch and lent it to us. It had two games: *F-Zero* and *Super Mario World*. We played them both pretty religiously, to the extent that we managed to overheat and blow up the console.

Super Mario World was one of the first games I completed in Japanese despite there being a whole ton of stuff that Mario could do. Of course, I couldn't read any of the hints, meaning I missed the one about being able to throw shells up in the air. This meant that to complete the final boss, I had to get the cape on an earlier level and make it through the last castle without getting hit. Once [there], I had to wait on one side of the screen for him to drop a Koopa before running along, jumping, hitting the thing and grabbing the shell, before using the momentum to fly up to the top of the screen and dropping the shell on him from above. I remember thinking it was tricky at the time [and] put it down to it being the end of the game.

John Romero
Co-Founder of id Software

The first time I saw Mario in action, I was at an arcade in Roseville, California, called Supercade. It was a weekend in 1981 and my friend Robert was with me. At this time in 1981, new games were showing up every week. The arcades were the most exciting places in the world. And in this particular arcade, this particular weekend, was a new game called *Donkey Kong*. We went up to the game, dropped in our quarters, and lost ourselves for several hours. When the smoke cleared, we had found a new favourite game and a favourite carpenter named Jumpman, who would be renamed in four years to the familiar name: Mario. We loved Mario's pixelated figure, his cute animations and cuter sound effects. His job was to rescue the princess and put out fire with a mallet. We loved the ridiculousness of it, and it fit in perfectly with the extreme abstractness of games of that time. For me, *Super Mario 3* was the pinnacle. It was just so epic. That game pushed the original NES to the extreme. The cartridge was packed to the limit with data – the game was huge at the time. And it took a while to play through. I was playing it in my Gamer's Edge office next to John Carmack as he coded.

often mistaken for Mario, owing to his stark resemblance to Nintendo's mascot.

Super Mario… Finally

Super Mario Bros was, in many respects, the natural next step for the main series to take. It took the popular 'rescue the girl' premise of *Donkey Kong*, applied it to the theme and two-player mode – albeit not simultaneous this time – introduced in *Mario Bros*, and then stretched the gameplay into a revolutionary side-scrolling platform game. Set in the fantasy fungal world of the Mushroom Kingdom, the 'Super' prefix came from the brothers' peculiar reaction to ingesting magic mushrooms, which took the form of power-ups in the game. Eating a mushroom would cause Mario and Luigi to grow in size, this growth spurt essentially acting like a shield but at the cost of making them easier for enemies to hit. And while in this state the eating of a Fire Flower power-up would make the plumbers truly super-powered, dressing them in lustrous white overalls and giving them the ability to lob fireballs.

Speaking in 1991's *Mario Mania Player's Guide*, Miyamoto revealed how the brothers' iconic growth spurt ability in the game came about: "We developed programming techniques that allowed us to create a larger character than we originally thought possible. At first, we planned to make the game so that the player was always 'big' Mario, but eventually, we came up with the idea for the power-up mushroom to make Mario Super."

Super Mario Bros was praised for its innovative gameplay, great visuals, catchy music, super-smooth scrolling, and wealth of secrets to discover – the most notable of which saw Mario actually breaking out of his own videogame in World 1-2; a truly mind-bending concept at the time, made even more impressive by the fact that doing so rewarded the player with the opportunity to warp to later levels in the game.

Selling over 40 million copies, *Super Mario Bros*' popularity can be largely attributed to the success of the Famicom/NES, and thus for also playing a key role in helping to resurrect the console industry in North America following its crash in 1983. In fact, *Super Mario Bros* currently stands as the second bestselling videogame of all time, only topped by *Wii Sports Resort* last year, demonstrating the sheer impact that this single game had on the games industry.

But *Super Mario Bros* wasn't the only *Mario* title released in 1985. The little-known NES game *Wrecking Crew* saw Mario continue in the tradition of his earlier arcade-style games. Rearmed with his trusty carpenter's hammer, and accompanied by Luigi, the game was a fun mix of smash-'em-up and puzzle game. Capping the brothers' ability to jump, *Wrecking Crew* saw Mario and Luigi race around, smashing bricks and pillars in an advantageous order so as to clear each stage of everything destructible. It even came with a level designer. But while a neat concept, it fell into obscurity in the shadow of *Super Mario Bros.*

Sequel Sequel Panic

Now if there's one thing that Nintendo was seen to struggle with during the 8-bit era, it was sequels. While *Donkey Kong Jr* was an enjoyable enough successor, it really wasn't a patch on the tight, engaging and insanely addictive gameplay of *Donkey Kong*. And while *Zelda II: The Adventure Of Link* had its good moments, to this day it's still deemed by many fans to be one of the weakest entries in the series. The *Super Mario Bros* series is no different and follows this peculiar pattern.

> "Mario played a key role in resurrecting the American industry"

Owing to *Super Mario Bros*' success, Nintendo was understandably keen to capitalise on the game's popularity and so quickly pushed out an expert version exclusively for the Famicom Disk System to satiate demand. Released in 1986 as *Super Mario Bros 2* in Japan, it was a single-player game only, with players given the choice of picking between a 'Mario game' or 'Luigi game', and the brothers were given different attributes: Mario had better traction; Luigi a higher jump. On top of this, the difficulty level was also increased, and the game made more challenging through the inclusion of poisonous mushrooms and more aggressive enemies. But when the game came to ship to North America, NOA stressed its concerns that the game wasn't different enough to be deemed a true sequel, and would be too challenging for Western gamers. Consequently, Nintendo was forced to do some rapid troubleshooting, and this led it to re-skin another platform game by Miyamoto and his team titled *Yume Kojo: Doki Doki Panic*.

Released for the Famicom Disk System in Japan, *Doki Doki* garnered modest sales, likely owing to its Disk System exclusivity, and so Nintendo had the brainwave of switching the game's four Arabian heroes with Mario, Luigi, Toad and Princess Toadstool (Peach) and repackaging it as *Super Mario Bros 2* in the West. Without the aid of the internet back then, a very large proportion of the planet would be none the wiser of this cheeky game swap. Of course, we later got the chance to test our skills on the Japanese sequel when it was remade as *Super Mario Bros: The Lost Levels* for the 1993 *Super Mario All-Stars* compilation pack on the Super Nintendo.

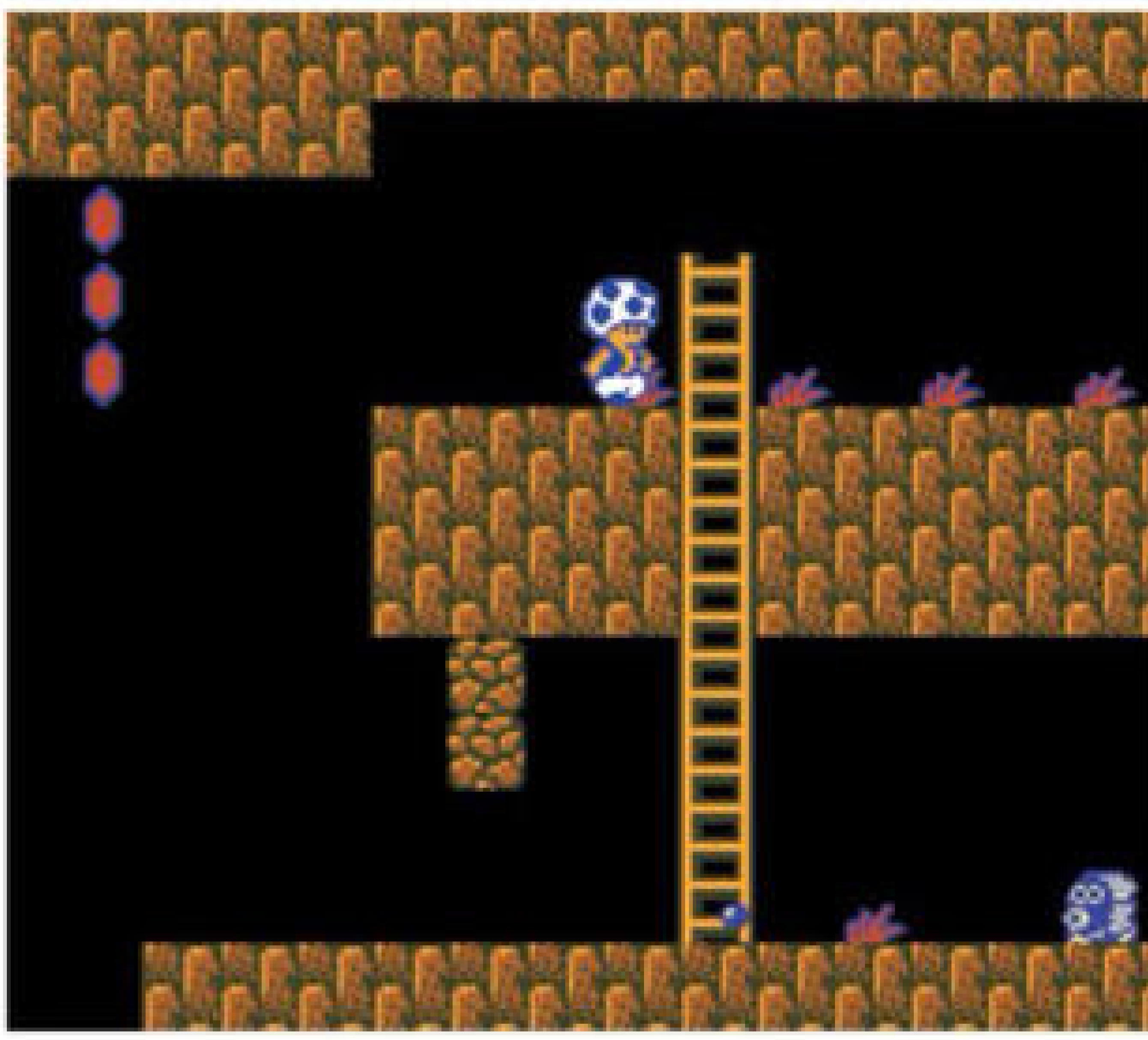
To tie everything together, *Doki*'s story was altered to explain away all the crazy Arabian leftovers – something about Mario entering a dream world called Subcon to defeat an evil frog overlord to free some enslaved fairy kids – and the game switch also explains why many of the enemies in the game never reappeared in subsequent *Mario* games, and Mario and pals' peculiar new attack method, which ditches head-stomping to see them instead pick up objects and enemies and toss them at other enemies.

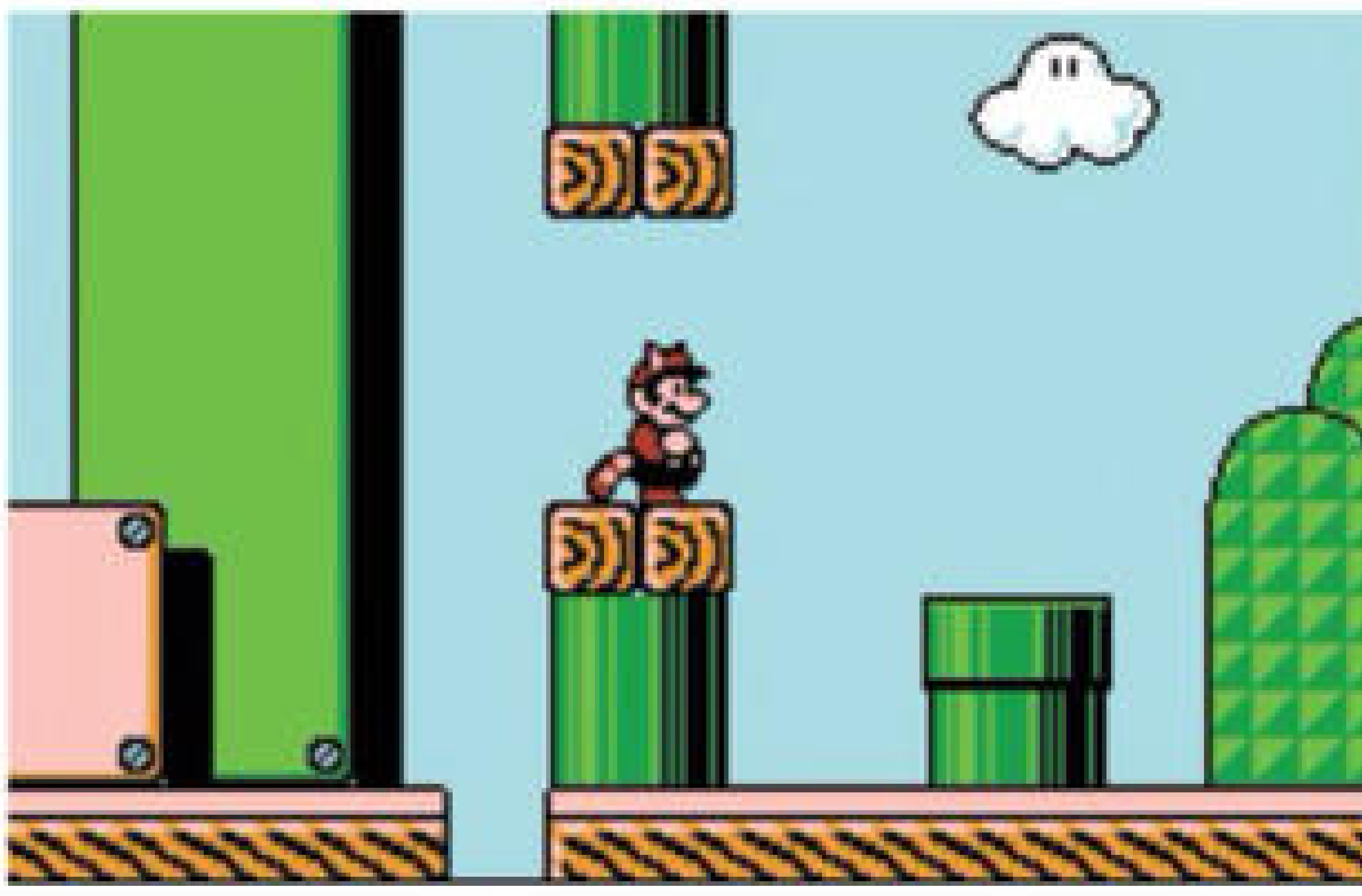
Released in the US in 1988, the re-skinned *Doki Doki* version of *Super Mario Bros 2* became a hot seller for the NES, becoming the third-bestselling game on the console, trading more copies than *The Legend Of Zelda*. And owing to its success, this version was later released in Japan in 1992 under the name *Super Mario USA*.

Hollywood comes-a knockin'

Towards the end of the Eighties, *Mario*-mania was starting to take effect, and its momentum was to be fuelled even further with the release of a game that many fans still consider to be the best game in the series. Taking two years to create, *Super Mario Bros 3* introduced more staples to the *Mario* series than any sequel before or since. It introduced elements such as an overworld map, complete with patrolling enemies that whisked the player to battle screens; enjoyable diversions by way of photo-fit mini-games; multiple routes through the game's eight massive worlds; new power-ups in the form of abstract costumes for the brothers; an inventory that allowed you to carry over items obtained in one stage into another, and more secrets than you could shake a Warp Whistle at.

To help create awareness and excitement for the release of the game in the US, *Super Mario*

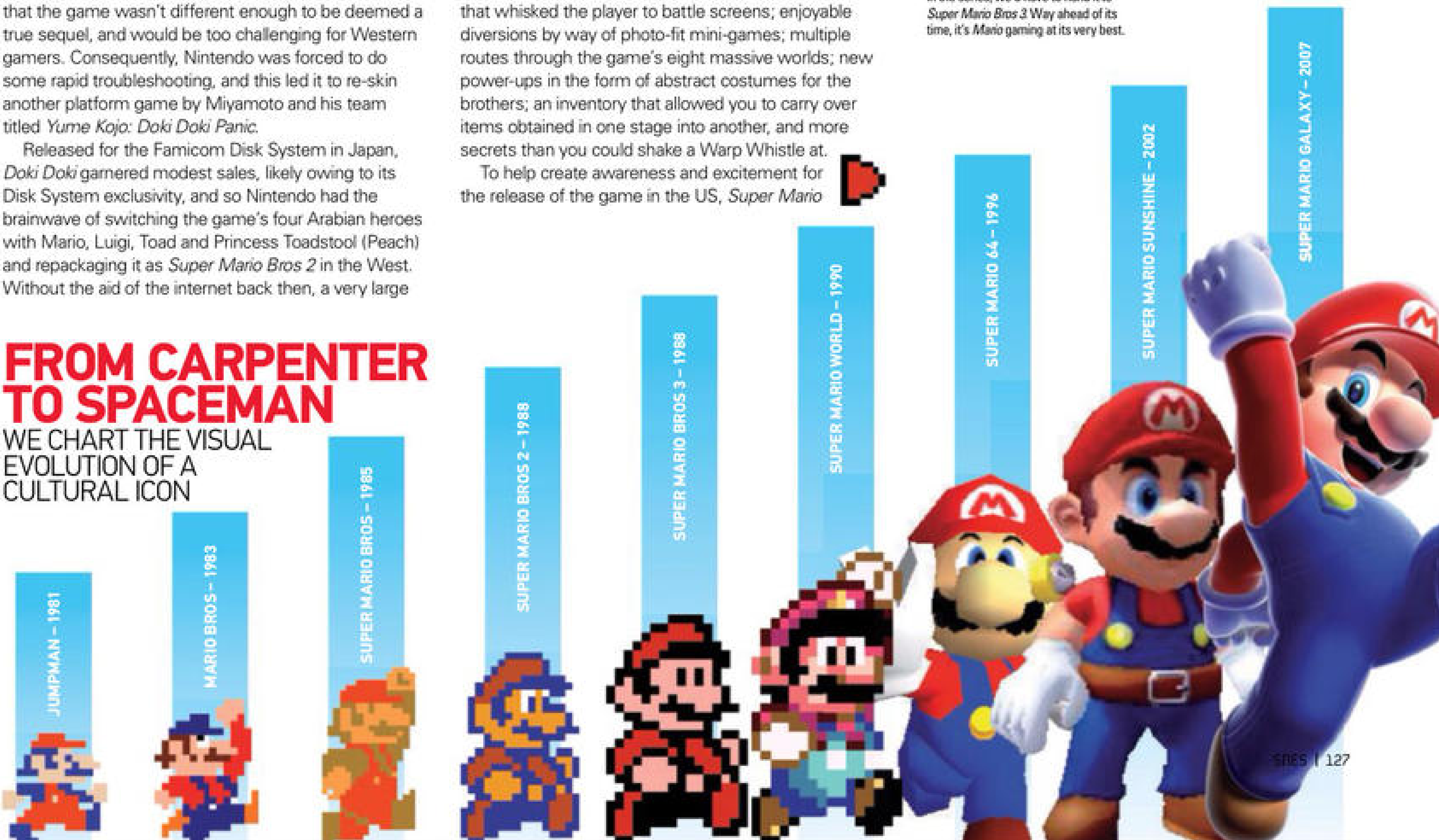




[NES] If we had to pick the best game in the series, we'd have to hand it to *Super Mario Bros 3*. Way ahead of its time, it's *Mario* gaming at its very best.

FROM CARPENTER TO SPACEMAN

WE CHART THE VISUAL EVOLUTION OF A CULTURAL ICON


JUMPMAN – 1981
MARIO BROS – 1983
SUPER MARIO BROS – 1985
SUPER MARIO BROS 2 – 1988
SUPER MARIO BROS 3 – 1988
SUPER MARIO WORLD – 1990
SUPER MARIO 64 – 1996
SUPER MARIO SUNSHINE – 2002
SUPER MARIO GALAXY – 2007

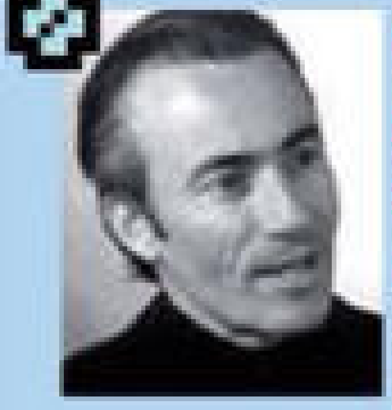
MR.VIDEOGAME

[SNES] The colourful *Super Mario World* stuck close to the *SMB3* template.

MARIO MEMORIES

Gary Bracey Software Manager Ocean Software

I spent quite some time in the early Eighties playing in the arcades, and so my first actual introduction to Mario was *Donkey Kong*. I recall he was the first 'human' character I had seen in games, as all others were cartoon or abstract like *Space Invaders* and *Pac-Man*. My next major encounter was when Ocean obtained the rights to convert the first *Mario Bros* platform game, which was an okay game. However, when I discovered *Super Mario Bros* on the NES I was completely blown away and spent many, many weeks playing it to completion… and then playing it again! It's one of the few franchises that has never suffered from compromise. Nintendo recognises this and *Zelda* to be its bar-setting titles, and also its console-shifting games. If they released a sub-par version then not only would the whole perception of the franchise suffer, but it would probably impact sales of the hardware. As for the character itself, he is as synonymous with Nintendo as Mickey Mouse is to Disney, yet a lot more contemporary. Over the years they have managed to develop his personality to keep pace with the advances in console technology, so from the original few pixels there is now a 'fleshed out' character with personality and charisma. From my own perspective, Mario is a reason alone to purchase any new Nintendo console, and I can think of no greater compliment to pay.



Trip Hawkins Founder of Electronic Arts

Naturally my first time seeing Mario was *Donkey Kong* in an arcade in Silicon Valley, perhaps 30 years ago. Miyamoto-san is the best game designer in the history of the industry, and Mario's appeal is ubiquitous.

Bros 3 was memorably first unveiled to Americans in the 1989 feature film *The Wizard*. Released into theatres a few months prior to the game's North American release, the movie's plot culminated in a Nintendo videogame tournament that ended with the finalists competing on a mysterious 'new game', which is revealed to be *Super Mario Bros 3*. Probably at the request of Nintendo, the game is hilariously unveiled in the film as if it were the single most brilliant objet d'art in the history of mankind. Although in hindsight we can let Nintendo off a little, as it actually comes pretty darn close.

But that wasn't all in the way of *Mario* marketing that year, as 1989 also spawned an animated/live action television show: *The Super Mario Bros Super Show!* The programme was an odd format that comprised a short ten-minute cartoon bookended by a peculiar live-action sitcom, in which Luigi was played by actor Danny Wells and Mario by former professional WWF wrestler Captain Lou Albano. Filmed in front of a probably perplexed studio audience, the show saw the pair conversing with drop-in celebrity guests from inside their *Bottom*-style dilapidated New York apartment, and in some episodes dress up in women's clothes to portray female versions of Mario and Luigi named Marianne and Luigeena. And if you think that sounds like a bizarre idea for a *Mario Bros* television show, during the holiday season of 1989 and 1990, Southern Californians witnessed *King Koopa's Kool Kartoons*, a live-action Krusty the Clown-type kids' telly show in which a guy dressed as Bowser presented cartoons to a room full of children, fondly referred to in the show as 'Koopa Troopas'.

1989 also marks the release of the Game Boy and saw Mario lose the pounds for his first proper portable adventure, *Super Mario Land*. A launch title for the Game Boy in Japan and North America, *Super Mario Land* was overseen by the *Donkey Kong* co-designer and *Metroid* and *Kid Icarus* producer, Gunpei Yokoi, and his solo involvement in the game resulted in a unique *Mario* title for the handheld. Putting his own stamp on the series, head-stomping Koopa Troopas now turned them into ticking time bombs, while striking some enemies in the game transformed them into a pile of decomposing bones. And elements of Yokoi's earlier work also found their way subtly into the game, such as a subterranean-style stage reminiscent of *Metroid* (Level 3-4) and the game ending with a side-scrolling shooter stage that saw Mario piloting a plane – a similar closing stage also occurred in *Kid Icarus*. Likely owing to Mario's popularity and the Game Boy's high installed base, *Super Mario Land* became a hugely successful *Mario* title, going on to sell more than 14 million units. It also spawned two sequels: *Super Mario Land 2: 6 Golden Coins*, notable for introducing Mario's doppelgänger Wario to the series, and *Wario Land: Super Mario Land 3*, in which the demented-looking villain took centre stage as a controllable character, in another first for the series.

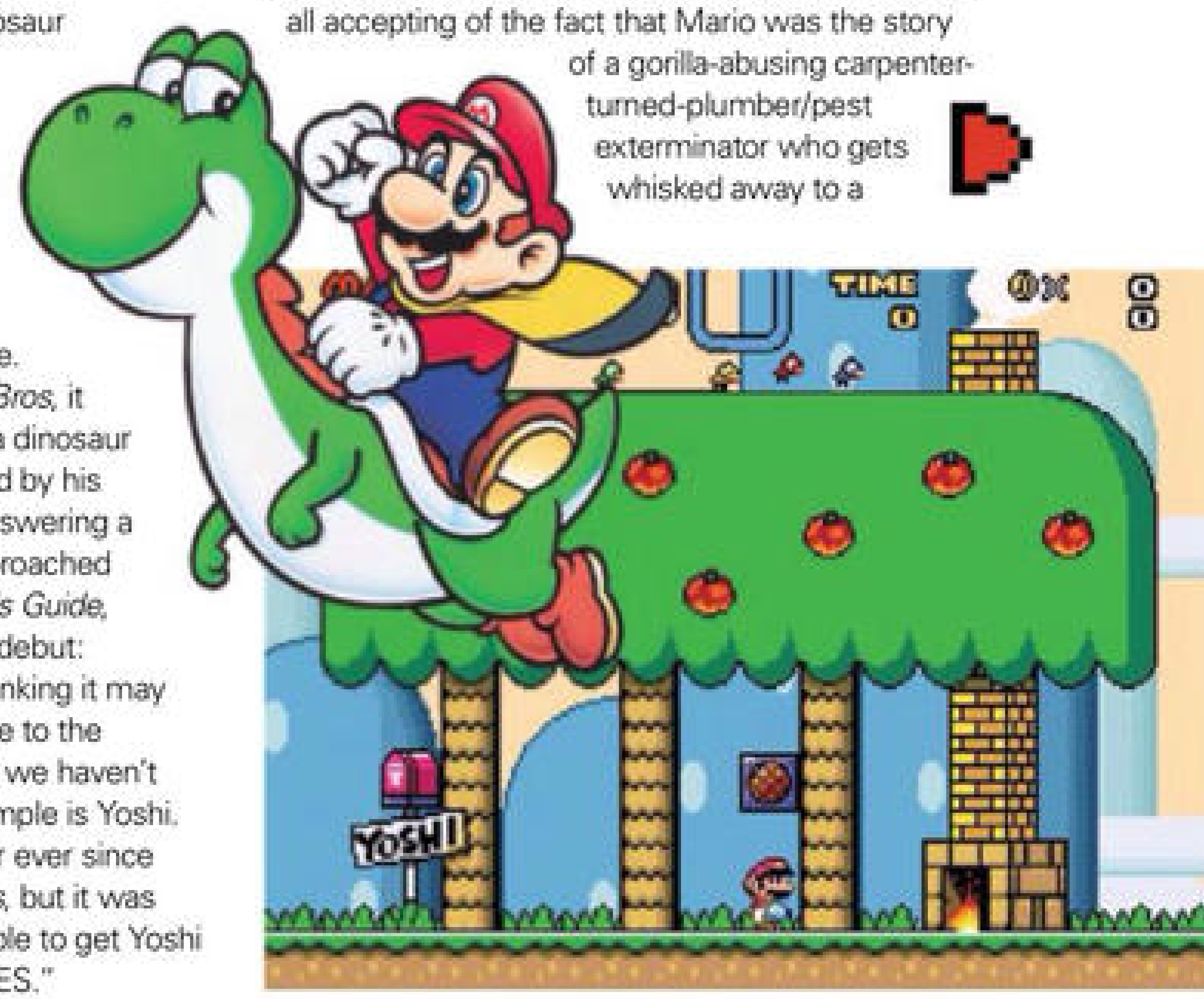
The arrival of the fourth generation of games consoles was an exciting time. Both the arcade and console markets were thriving, the NES had successfully brought gaming back home in North America, and Sega was officially first off the mark to make inroads into this new 16-bit era of gaming with the Mega Drive. With Mario now a global household name, gamers were eagerly anticipating the release of Nintendo's next instalment, especially as it was to be launched alongside its new-fangled 16-bit games console.

Released in 1990, *Super Mario World* stuck close to the *Super Mario Bros 3* template. Miyamoto and his team set about using the extra technical power of the Super Nintendo to create an enhanced, but not necessarily more innovative, version of the NES classic. Gone were the enjoyable mini-games and inventory, and Mario received a new makeover as well as an array of new power-ups, including a yellow cape that afforded him the power of temporary flight, and a lovable green dinosaur companion in the form of Yoshi – a character whose grabbing tongue was possibly inspired by Nintendo's popular Ultra Hand grabbing toy, and whose name could have derived as a portmanteau of Nintendo's then-president, Hiroshi Yamauchi. This is all pure **Retro Gamer** speculation, of course.

Following the release of *Super Mario Bros*, it was Miyamoto's intention to give Mario a dinosaur steed – an idea said to have been inspired by his motocross racing game, *Excitebike*. In answering a question about how he and his team approached *Mario* sequels in the *Mario Mania Player's Guide*, Miyamoto explained the delay in Yoshi's debut: "Once the game is released, we start thinking it may not be such a bad idea to add another title to the series. We usually have lots of ideas that we haven't been able to implement yet. A good example is Yoshi. We wanted to have Mario ride a dinosaur ever since we finished the original *Super Mario Bros*, but it was impossible technically. We were finally able to get Yoshi off the drawing boards with the Super NES."

Nintendo then followed up *Super Mario World* with *Super Mario Kart*. It became the bestselling racing game on the system, and Mario's most successful spin-off game series. Mario was now showing himself as a cultural icon, and the versatile face of Nintendo. In fact, his popularity had swelled so much that it was almost a given that the character would pique the interest of film studios wanting to cash in on his celebrity. And so Mario and Luigi did the inevitable, heading to the big screen for a live-action retelling of their videogame antics for the 1993 movie *Super Mario Bros*, plonking actors Bob Hoskins, John Leguizamo and Dennis Hopper in the roles of Mario, Luigi and Bowser, respectively. However, for all its promise and hype, the movie, which decides to throw out the colourful *Mario Bros* universe to plonk the brothers inside some kind of rubbish version of *Total Recall*, tanked at the box office and was branded an unmitigated big-budget failure, and Mario has never made a return to Tinseltown since.

Mario's next big Super Nintendo release came in the form of *Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island*. In the game, Mario and Luigi were depicted as babies, with the player now fully assuming the role of a Yoshi and tasked with completing a colourful relay race to get Mario safely to his parents. Of course, given the infant ages of the brothers in the game, *SMW2* is deemed a prequel to the entire Mario series. Its story is thus pure retcon, as the game's ending shows the brothers delivered to their parents, who are seen living inside a house in the Mushroom Kingdom. That said, when you remember that before this point we were all accepting of the fact that Mario was the story of a gorilla-abusing carpenter-turned-plumber/pest exterminator who gets whisked away to a



> "SMB3 was unveiled like the most brilliant objet d'art in history. It's actually close"

MARIO MEMORIES

Philip and Andrew Oliver
Co-Founders Blitz Software

PO: We first saw Mario appear in the *Donkey Kong* arcade game in 1981. A few years later, in 1988, we went to the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas and were stunned by the magnitude of the games industry and the size of Nintendo's presence. And at the heart of it all was Mario. At that time, *Super Mario Bros* was at its height on the NES – I think they'd sold in the region of 20 million copies, which was incredible.

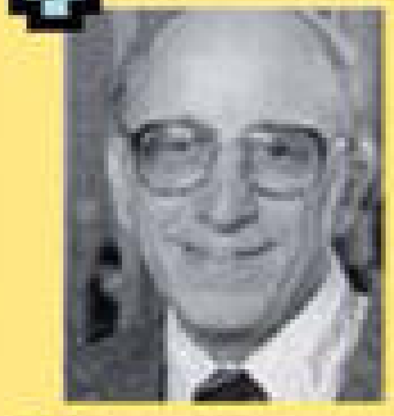
AO: I remember seeing *Mario Bros* on a Japanese imported NES in about 1986. I remember it looking clean, slick and very playable. And best of all, it was instantly easily accessible. The first time I saw Mario as a character was in the arcade game *Donkey Kong*. Back then he didn't strike me as a brilliant character, but he always starred in brilliant games.

PO: All the Mario games are great. I guess we played the original a fair bit, but it was *Super Mario 64* that proved to the world that character games work better in 3D. Andrew will definitely go for *Mario Kart*, as it's his all-time favourite game! It's up there near the top with me too.

AO: Mario represents games of brilliant gameplay. He's also had a lot of work done on his 'personality', as the graphical powers of machines have been updated. Each revision has been very skilfully managed and has served to embellish and deepen Mario's qualities – they've been careful never to change his persona fundamentally, so the Mario today is essentially the same guy as the Mario of the Eighties.

Steve Lycett
Sumo Digital

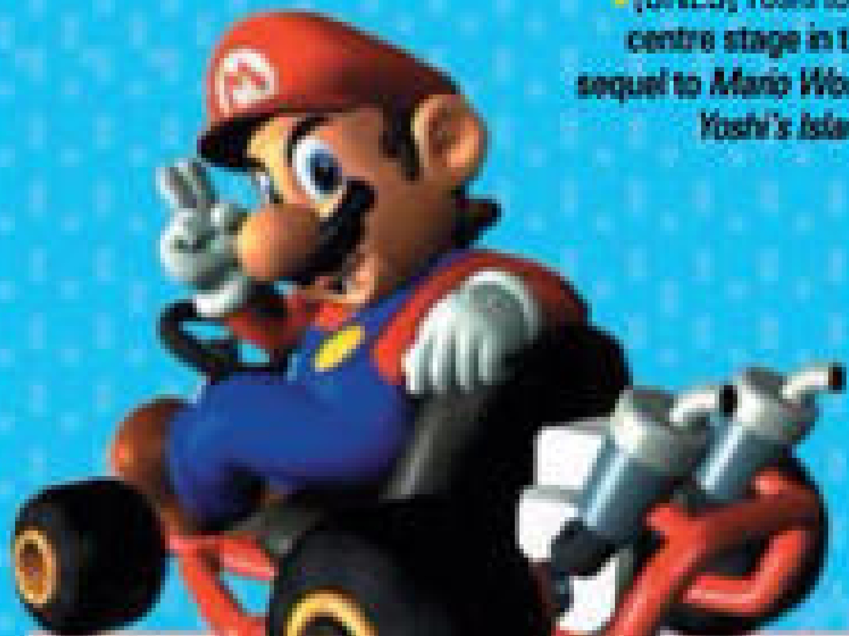
Boringly, I'll have to plump for *Super Mario World* as my favourite *Mario* game. I got a SNES for my 18th birthday, and lost weeks of my life hunting down all the hidden exits, completing Star Road and then rinsing it twice for the second credits sequence. An amazing game that's clearly ageing better than I am! I think his appeal simply boils down to quality. Bar the odd exception, if it's got 'Mario' in the title you know you'll be getting something that's been built with love, care and attention to detail, and will provide you with hours of fun. I'll happily buy a *Mario* title without reading a single review. Nintendo will always deliver the goods!



Ralph Baer Creator of videogames

To me, Mario is a living presence. I still have the original NES and the *Duck Hunt/Mario* cart that goes with it. Over the decades I have demonstrated interacting physically with the *Duck Hunt* game in the manner of today's Wii games. As has been so often the case, I was 20 years too early with those concepts. Meanwhile, who can resist playing the original *Mario* game when that old TV set is turned on in my demo area and I'm not bringing down those ducks by lobbing something physical at them?

▸ [SNES] Yoshi took centre stage in the sequel to *Mario World*, *Yoshi's Island*.



Honourable Mentions

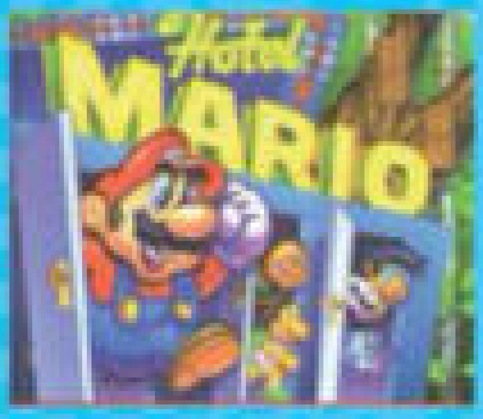
Here are some of the more unusual Mario games, which aren't part of the Super Mario canon

FROM CARPENTE... TO SPACEMAN
WE CHART THE V...UAL
EVOLUTION OF A
CULTURAL ICON

Mario Clash
VIRTUAL BOY
■ This red-looking 3D redux of the original *Mario Bros* coin-op was the first of two *Mario* games released for the Virtual Boy, the other being *Mario Tennis*. It's also the first ever 3D *Mario* game, if you discount *Super Mario Kart*.

Alleyway
GAME BOY
■ Although not really a *Mario* game per se, this decent *Breakout* clone saw Mario piloting the game's bat. You couldn't actually tell this from the in-game graphics, mind, but he's there on the front of the box art, sporting some natty overalls.

Mario Paint
SUPER NINTENDO
■ One of the few games to use the Super Nintendo's mouse peripheral, which came as a pack-in with the game, this artistic spin-off allowed budding artists to create drawings, stamps and animations and then set them to sounds using a music generator.



Hotel Mario
PHILLIPS CD-I
■ Often cited as being the worst *Mario* game ever. This CD-i puzzle title was a waste product from the messy Super Nintendo CD saga and tasked players with rescuing Princess Toadstool by closing a whole bunch of doors, for reasons never explained.

All Night Nippon Super Mario Bros
FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM
■ This game would be considered one of the most bizarre *Mario* clones to find release, were it not released by Nintendo. This *Super Mario Bros/Lost Levels* fusion featured DJs from a popular Japanese radio show.

Mario Education Games
NES, SNES, PC
■ The plumber also appeared in a series of educational games. These included the geography-themed *Mario Is Missing!*, the typing trainer, *Mario Teaches Typing*, and *Mario's Time Machine*, a thinly veiled history lesson.

Super Mario Excitebike
SUPER NINTENDO (SATELLAVIEW)
■ Mario and friends appeared in this little-known *Excitebike* title, which meshed together *Mario Kart* with motocross. Released in four parts, it was only available through the Satellaview service.

A Friendly Rivalry… Eventually

No feature on Mario would be complete without at least mentioning the epic 16-bit videogame war that Mario played a major part in. During the height of the 16-bit generation, school playgrounds around the globe were divided. One side bound together by a love for a dinosaur-riding Italian plumber named Mario; the other in support for a skittish, edgy and nippy blue hedgehog called Sonic. These two company mascots could scarcely be more different, but together their rivalry spearheaded one of the most exciting periods in gaming ever. With each console generation that passed their competition softened, until Sega eventually bailed out of the hardware market altogether in 2001. What happened next, no school kid back in 1993 could ever have predicted: Sega started releasing *Sonic* games on Nintendo consoles, starting with *Sonic Adventure 2 Battle* on Nintendo's GameCube. And then two videogame mascots got to finally settle their differences publicly when they appeared together in the game *Mario & Sonic At The Olympic Games* in 2007, followed by the long-awaited chance to beat the crap out of each other in 2008's *Super Smash Bros Brawl*.

MARIO MEMORIES

Martyn Brown Team 17 Founder

Obviously, like many people, I first saw Mario in *Donkey Kong*, but he really played second fiddle to DK. It's amazing to think that Nintendo took the Mario character and threw him into the *Super Mario* world, as it was an anonymous character before then. I wasn't super sure what to make of the first true *Mario* game in terms of character, other than it being brilliantly playable – I was too busy with the Amiga around that time anyway. I think my favourite *Mario* game has been *Super Mario 64*, the first 3D offering, because it was so incredibly well-considered for its time. I've enjoyed the past games, but they get a bit too hardcore for me. Mario's remained so enduring because he's so charming and a lot of fun. The games are generally so well-balanced to play that it's difficult to get too frustrated and therefore swear at him, although I'm sure it's been done a few times – even by me.

David Braben
Co-Creator of Elite

I think my first experience of Mario was in a pub, in the original *Donkey Kong*. To be honest I didn't particularly register the character, more the way the game was played, which seemed a little bizarre at the time! *Mario 64* on the Nintendo 64 was the first Mario game I really enjoyed playing, as it was, for me at least, less annoying than the previous outings. Later games are great too, but *Mario 64* sticks in my mind the strongest, as for its time **it was a great trailblazer.** Interestingly, in the days of *Donkey Kong* and *Super Mario Bros* the character image was pretty indistinct and heavily pixelated. Later games featured him as an image, and I think that is when he started to be identified, but *Mario 64* was the first game, I think, that really made a character out of him, for example when he spoke on the title screen of the game. If anything, especially in the USA, I think he has become the icon of Nintendo. Other factors – like the fact that he seems to run like a toddler does – makes him pretty endearing. He is a pretty non-threatening character.

[Wii] Mario's back on top form following two superb Wii titles that are literally out of this world.

mushroom land through a giant pipe and must then rescue their princess from a giant turtle king, we guess such changes can be forgiven.

Released in 1996, Mario's final Super Nintendo outing saw him throw his cap into another new genre, this time the RPG with the Square-developed *Super Mario RPG: Legend Of The Seven Stars*. The game was a mixture of isometric platform RPG and turn-based battles, and the game's visuals utilised the snazzy ACM graphics techniques seen in *Donkey Kong Country*. But coming late in the Super Nintendo's life, and only released in the US and Japan, it was largely missed by many on its release.

Mario reaches 64

Another new console saw another groundbreaking entry in the *Mario* series come, this time in the form of *Super Mario 64* for the N64. Always innovating, Nintendo once again sought to revolutionise the platform genre, and in doing so proved undoubtedly that the creative, fun, engaging and abundant gameplay of previous *Mario* adventures could adapt to a true 3D polygon world unscathed. The N64's analogue controls also worked overtime to further enhance the experience. With a wealth of new acrobatic moves at Mario's disposal, *Mario 64* turned him from portly jumpy plumber into a gaming Baryshnikov. Finally, through a series of open-ended levels – all connected by a castle-shaped hub – that unfurled with each revisit, it offered players the chance to really immerse themselves in the colourful and enchanting world of the Mushroom Kingdom. It was truly the gaming equivalent of chasing the rabbit down to Wonderland, and with the inclusion of Mips the rabbit in the game, who spouted dialogue very similar to Lewis Carroll's tardy White Rabbit, this notion was clearly not lost on Miyamoto and his EAD team.

Following the release of *Mario 64*, Mario himself then broke into even more game genres with the first entry in the Hudson-developed *Mario Party* series. And the N64 era also saw Mario return to his NES sporting roots in *Mario Golf* and *Mario Tennis*, before appearing in the first *Super Smash Bros* and making his final 'so long' for the console with *Paper Mario*.

Owing to the early release of *Mario 64* on the N64, it comes as a surprise to many that a sequel was never released on the system. Well, in actual fact, for a time a *Mario 64* sequel was in development, albeit for the 64DD. In 1997 Miyamoto revealed to E3 attendees that work had started on the game. However, following the disastrous launch of the add-on in Japan, and its subsequent poor domestic sales, Nintendo promptly stopped support for the hardware and the game was scrapped.

During Nintendo's Space World event in 2000, the company showcased the power of its brand new console, the GameCube, with a *Mario* tech demo dubbed *Super Mario 128*. The short demonstration showed a large 2D Mario splintering into 128 smaller versions that ran across the surface of a globe. It showcased, for the first time, the 'sphere-walking' tech that was to be later utilised for *Super Mario Galaxy*.

The following year, however, and at the same show, *Super Mario Sunshine* was unveiled to the crowds, and while it shared little likeness to *Super Mario 128*, it was formally announced as the official sequel to *Mario 64*. Apart from a story that saw Mario partaking in a spot of community service after the squeaky plumber is forced to clean up the mess left by a muck-spraying imposter, *Sunshine* stuck very close to *Mario 64*'s template.

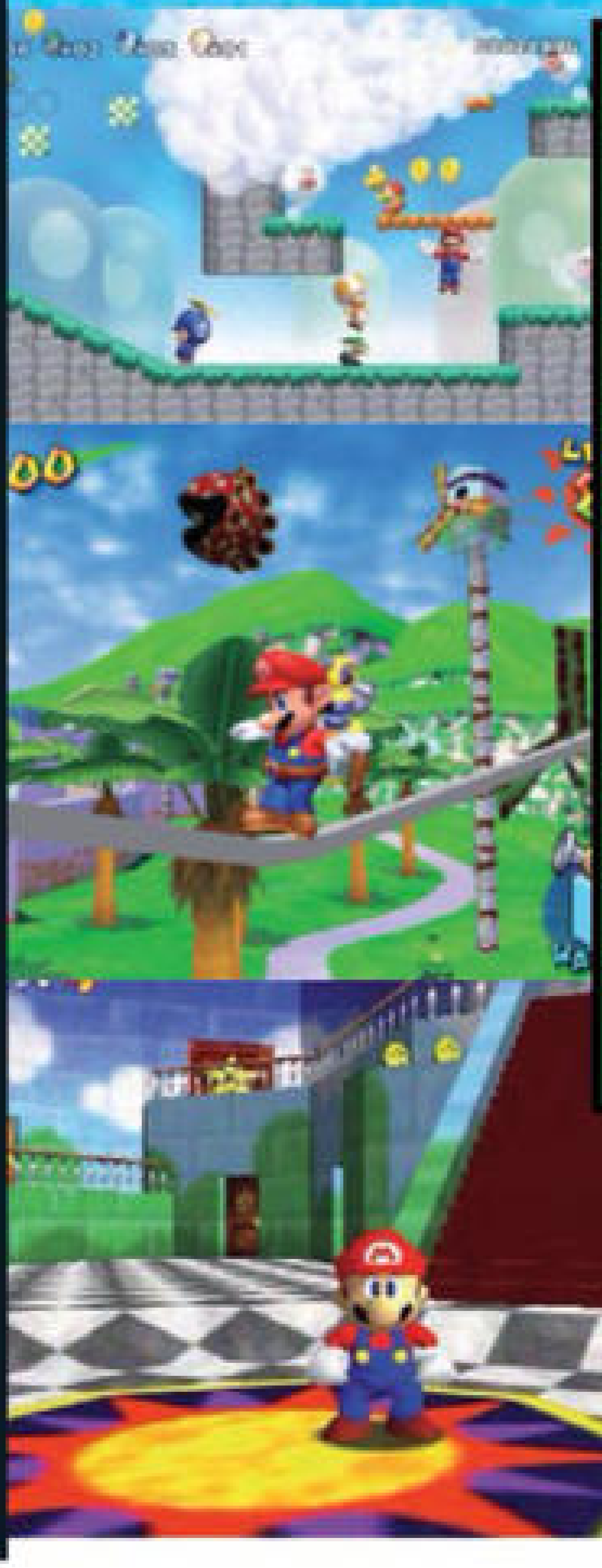
Set in the sun-drenched Isle Delfino, *Sunshine* kept the popular hub structure of *Mario 64*, and progression still relied on the collection of Stars – now named Shine Sprites. As well as the 3D return of Yoshi, the most novel feature in *Sunshine* came in the form of an odd rucksack armament called FLUDD (Flash Liquidizing Ultra Dousing Device) that Mario could use not only as a cleaning weapon but also as a way to help get around the stages. Clever aiming of the FLUDD's spray nozzles

MARIO MEMORIES

Ste Pickford

Legendary 8-bit coder

Definitely *Donkey Kong* in Stockport Arcade, or maybe on holiday in Blackpool or Southport. Of course I never knew that was Mario at the time. I could never get past the second screen, but must have spent dozens of 10ps trying. The first real introduction to Mario was at Rare. We had a meeting there in about 1988, and they showed us *Super Mario Bros* on a NES. We must have just screwed our faces up because of how ugly it looked. We were heavily into developing Amiga and Atari ST games at the time, and had sort of graduated from blocky four-colour graphics to higher-res 16-colour graphics with large, non-repeating bitmaps. The Stampers told us to ignore the fact that it didn't look that good, and insisted that we play it because it was better than any Amiga game. We laughed, but I think they lent us a NES with a couple of games, and sure enough, *Super Mario Bros* was brilliant. The irony is that the simple, functional graphics of *SMB* have dated much better than the over-worked Amiga graphics of the same period. Without a doubt my favourite Mario game is *Super Mario Bros 3*. We were developing NES games ourselves when it was released, and we were just blown away by how much better this game was than anything we were working on. It was at that point that I first appreciated what a great designer Mr Miyamoto was, and what a great developer Nintendo is. They were streets ahead of everyone else in the world at that time. That game introduced so many new ideas, and had so much imagination – every new level was surprising and delightful. I don't think that level of consistent invention in one game has been matched by any game since, until *Super Mario Galaxy*, but *Super Mario Bros 3* wins for me because of the big impression it made on me when I was younger.



[N64] A landmark game for Mario, which set an unreachable benchmark for future 3D games to try to meet.

MARIO MEMORIES

Greg Omi

Atari Lynx progammer

I first saw Mario in *Donkey Kong*, but the first time I really recognised Mario was in *Super Mario Bros* for the Nintendo. I was working at Epyx at the time and the testers were playing it. That year I bought NES consoles for all of my nieces and nephews.

Mario Kart 64 is probably my favourite *Mario* game because it led us to make *Crash Team Racing*, which I consider to be the most fun game I've ever worked on. I loved the slide mechanics and the random power-ups to rubber band the gameplay, helping out the players in the back. Really good level design also. I love Wario Stadium with the unintentional short cut at the beginning of the track where you could jump over the wall twice to get a really low lap time.

Right place right time and branding. Mario came to represent Nintendo as a mascot because of the success of *Super Mario Bros*. This led Nintendo to market based on Mario, which increased his popularity. Popularity is a power function, so once you have brand recognition, you have inertia to give you a leg up on the competition. That's why everyone makes sequels, why movie companies try to make blockbuster movies, and why indies and original material have a hard time breaking through. Just look at social gaming: *FarmVille*, which I now work on, is twice as popular as the next most popular game; there are a bunch of games around second place, followed by the 'long tail' of games after that. There can only be one super popular game at a time, and at some point *FarmVille*'s popularity will fade and another game will rise to fill its spot. *World Of Warcraft* is another example of this.

could launch Mario up into the air and even afford him a handy spray-powered speed boost. However, the device quickly became a bone of contention with many fans when they soon discovered that it hindered the responsive control of Mario, and made retrieving stars almost feel like Mario-endorsed GCSE physics exercises.

With *Mario Sunshine* failing to capture or stir up the same level of popularity as previous big-budget *Mario* titles, and it becoming increasing likely that the GameCube would become Nintendo's most unsuccessful console to date, outwardly it seemed that the once-infallible videogame giant was finally losing its grip on the market it formerly dominated, and Mario seemed to echo this sense of dispassion, appearing in a series of decent but uninspired sports sequels – *Mario Power Tennis, Mario Superstar Baseball* and *Mario Golf Toadstool Tour* – following a good but equally uninspired *Mario Kart* sequel with *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!*. But just as it seemed Nintendo was becoming crestfallen by its fall from greatness, the Wii happened and changed its fortunes in a way that nobody could have predicted.

> **"This industry would be a far glummer place without Mario"**

[Wii U] *Super Mario 3D World* is the next adventure for the popular plumber and is due later this year. Here's hoping it's as fun as *Super Mario World*.

Space: the finest frontier

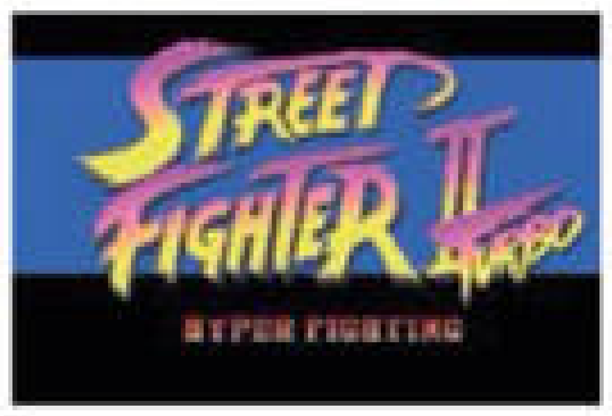
Both *Mario Galaxy* and *Mario Galaxy 2* stand as nigh-on flawless examples of expert game design, and rank among the best games in the *Mario* series. By making inspired and sensible use of the Wii's motion-sensor controls, Nintendo was able to recapture the keen sense of fun, exploration and enjoyment that dazzled gamers in *Mario 64*. Making use of the sphere-walking technology first demoed in *Super Mario 128*, Miyamoto and his team shot for the stars by opting to set the games in outer space, with levels taking the form of galaxies, all filled with individual planets and worlds to explore. Like *Mario 64* before it, the controls were also wonderfully implemented. Players could steer Mario in comfortable *Mario 64* fashion, but also aid him using the Wii Remote, which, through an on-screen reticule, could be used to suck up 'Star Bits' and launch Mario between planets. The *Galaxy* games also saw a return of the costume-style power-ups of old, including a bee costume that gave Mario the power of temporary flight and the first 3D iteration of the Fire Flower.

Complementing these two interstellar *Mario* adventures was another *Paper Mario* game, one of the best *Mario Kart* sequels to date in *Mario Kart Wii*, and a real return to the character's Famicom roots in the four-player platformer *New Super Mario Bros*, a game that brought simultaneous multiplayer back to the series for the first time since the original *Mario Bros*. And Nintendo's love for the past looks set to continue. To celebrate Mario's 'super' 25th anniversary, Nintendo released its *Super Mario Special Collection* for the Wii, a special edition version of *Super Mario All-Stars*.

Since then we've had the utterly sublime *Super Mario 3D Land* on Nintendo 3DS, the less impressive, but still enjoyable, *New Super Mario Bros 2* and an enjoyable Wii U entry in the shape of *New Super Mario Bros U*. Interestingly Mario's side-on antics aren't feeling as fresh as they once did and its clear that most of the imagination is now being placed in his 3D adventures. This is most obvious with the incoming release of *Super Mario 3D World*, which features an emphasis on multiplayer play, crazy looking environments and cute looking cat suits. Here's hoping it manages to capture the glory days of his early NES and SNES adventures.

STREET FIGHTER II TURBO

RETURN OF THE KING



- **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** SNES

HISTORY

Regular forum visitors will no doubt be aware that I don't exactly have a lot of love for Capcom's seminal brawler. Don't get me wrong. I'm fully aware of its historical importance and realise that plenty of people still play it on a regular basis (last year's visit to the Retro Ball was all the proof you needed) but after witnessing the glorious choreography of *Street Fighter 3: Third Strike*, its older peer appeared to have nothing new to offer. How wrong I was…

Thanks to Capcom, and more importantly, Xbox Live arcade, I've been able to re-discover the joy of *Street Fighter II*, or more specifically, *Street Fighter II' Hyper Fighting* (or *Turbo* as it's known to us Brits). While the original *Street Fighter II* remains a slow, turgid experience (sorry guys, but it's true) *Turbo* gives the game a much-needed boost of speed and ensures that bouts are always satisfying to play. New costumes, extra moves and re-designed backdrops were just a few of the additions that Capcom included and I still have the cool metal tin that it was lovingly packaged in.

While later titles have presented us with more character choices than ever, ridiculous specials and the beauty that is parrying, there's still something immensely satisfying about a no-nonsense round of *Turbo*. There's no need to worry about pulling off double fireball motions, you won't moan over the cheapness of *Third Strike's* Chun-Li and Ken, you can just concentrate on mastering the good old fashioned art of beating the hell out of each other. Sure the character models look a little old-fashioned now and the animation has lost a lot of its slickness over the years, but even with these niggles (and that's all they really are) *Turbo's* gameplay remains resoundingly solid.

While it's no longer my 2D fighter of choice (that honour goes to the excellent digital port of *Street Fighter III: Third Strike*, I still enjoy the odd bout of fisticuffs on Capcom's excellent brawler whenever I have my SNES out (which is often). It remains one of the slickest 16-bit arcade conversions around, and time has done nothing to diminish that fact.

KO
63
RYU

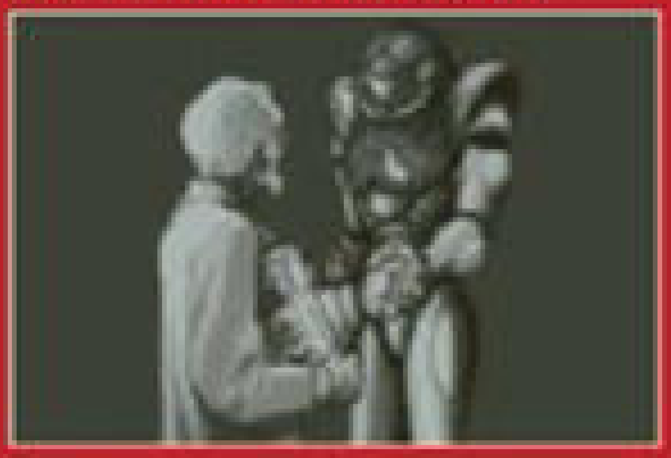
THE MAKI

SUPER METROID

The Metroid series went in exciting new directions with the release of this 16-bit classic. Jonti Davies visits Nintendo HQ to scale the summit of the Metroid series with director Yoshio Sakamoto

» Sakamoto also directed *Metroid Fusion* and *Zero Mission*

IN THE KNOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **DEVELOPER:** R&D1/INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS
- » **RELEASED:** 1994
- » **GENRE:** ADVENTURE

Heading back up to ground level as I leave the immaculate subway at Jujo Station in the south of Kyoto, I walk through this remarkably unremarkable suburb until I see the big white block that houses Nintendo's contemporary headquarters. The gates to NCL are manned by two portly, middle-aged guards who seem to project a faintly threatening presence, which is comically undone as I notice, behind them, in the back of their little booth, a stash of NCL-manufactured toy guns apparently left over from the Seventies and a selection of Nintendo character plushes from the Famicom era. This may not be the original Nintendo HQ site, but it clearly retains the company's history like a hoarding retro gamer hangs on to loose carts.

Inside, beyond the pristine lawns and shiny entrance, I enter a marble-floored, austere world whose foyer is staffed by painfully polite and correctly spoken Nintendo officials. Eventually I'm led into a meeting room on the ground floor, where I sip the o-cha kindly provided by the demure NCL woman as I wait – and slightly nervously revise my notes and cue my Dictaphone – until a smiling, ponytailed artist type arrives and immediately makes his introduction. This is Yoshio Sakamoto, producer of *Super Metroid* back in the early Nineties and still an integral Nintendo developer today. "Hajimemashite. Yoroshiku onegai shimasu."

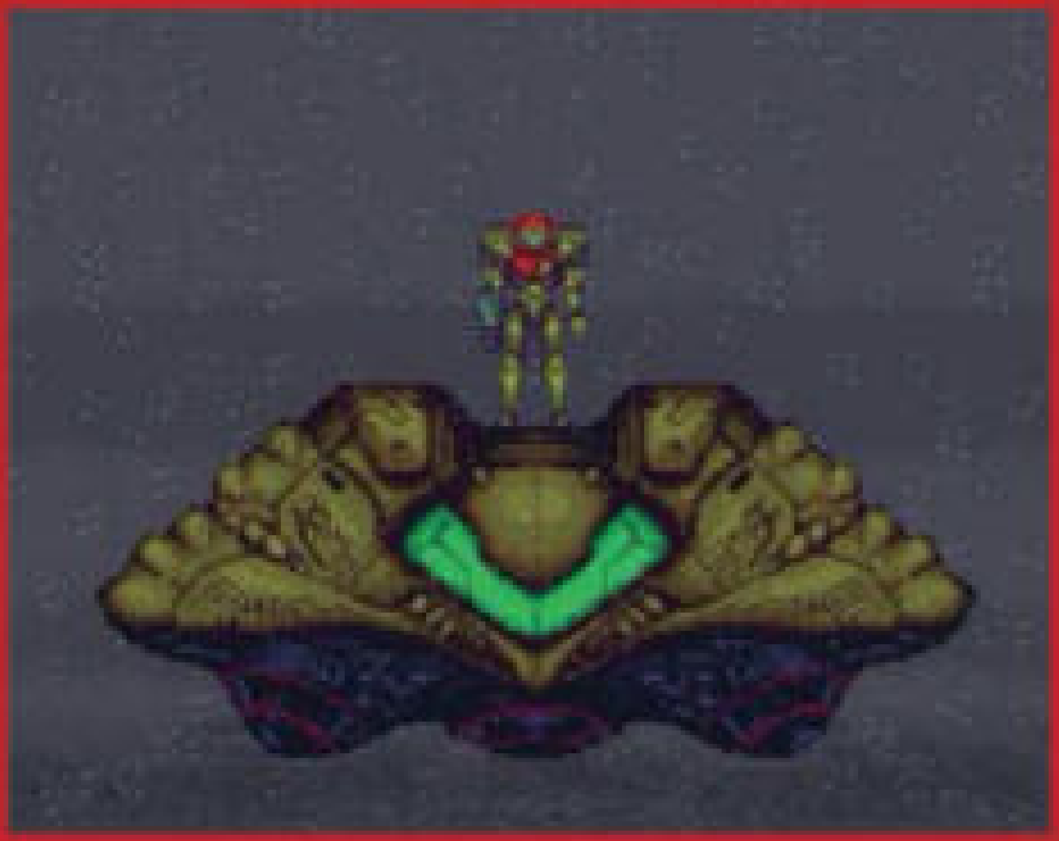
Sakamoto has brought with him a small booklet containing an overview of *Super Metroid* to aid his memory – the game was completed 15 years ago, but the *Metroid* legacy stretches back two decades – as we chat.

"To start with, there was the Famicom *Metroid* game," he recalls. Sakamoto worked on that first *Metroid* adventure, and its relevance to *Super Metroid* is particularly important because of the unchanging core concept of the 2D *Metroid* games; a core that was formed in said Famicom Disk System original of 1986.

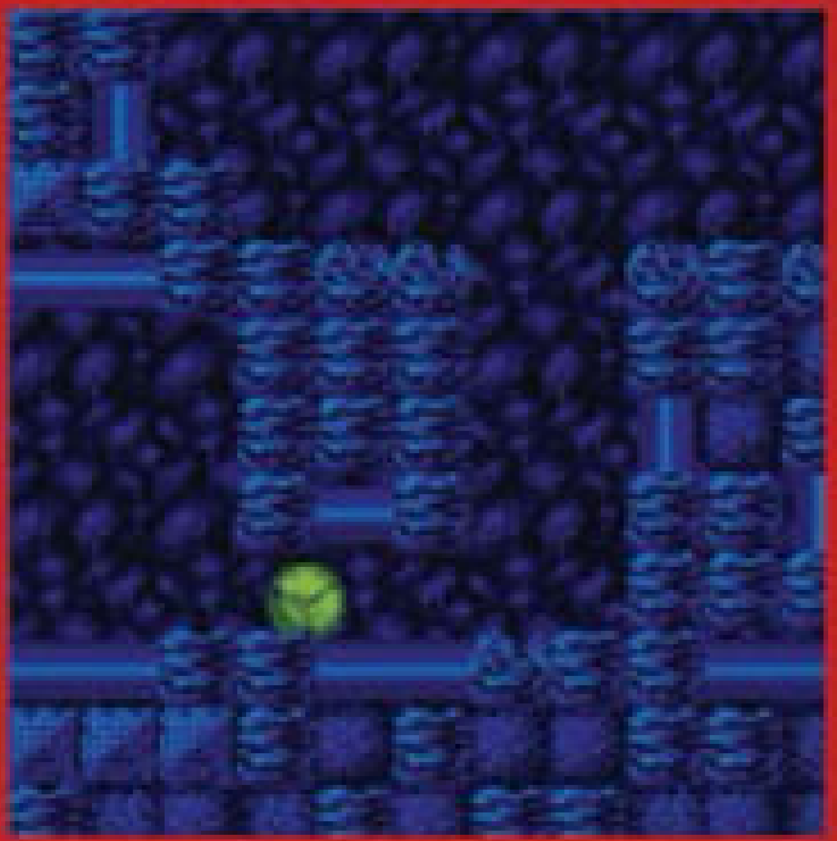
"My boss [producer Makoto Kanoh] told me that *Metroid* was really popular in North America, so he encouraged me to produce a new *Metroid* game with the high-quality graphics that were becoming possible thanks to the Super Famicom. Of course I said, 'Yes, I'd like to try doing that.' The game design and concept had already been established before *Metroid II* was produced for the Game Boy," Sakamoto explains. "When it came to making another sequel, this time for the Super Famicom, we really wanted to see how far we could push the SFC to generate greater power of expression and enhance the appearance of the game world, all while working with a basically unchanged concept. That was our initial motivation as far as *Super Metroid* was concerned: to build on the expressiveness of *Metroid II* and achieve greater presence, something closer to a reality."

Sakamoto had nothing to do with the development of *Metroid II* – at the time his services were required elsewhere within NCL – yet that sophomore title in part shaped the plan for *Super Metroid*: "As the last scene depicted Baby Metroid being born right in front of Samus's eyes… well… there's no real explanation for that in the course of the games, but that scene was another source of incentive for us in that we wanted to follow on from that ending, linking *Metroid II* with *Super Metroid*. We were determined to keep the same world-view and maintain the continuity of the story."

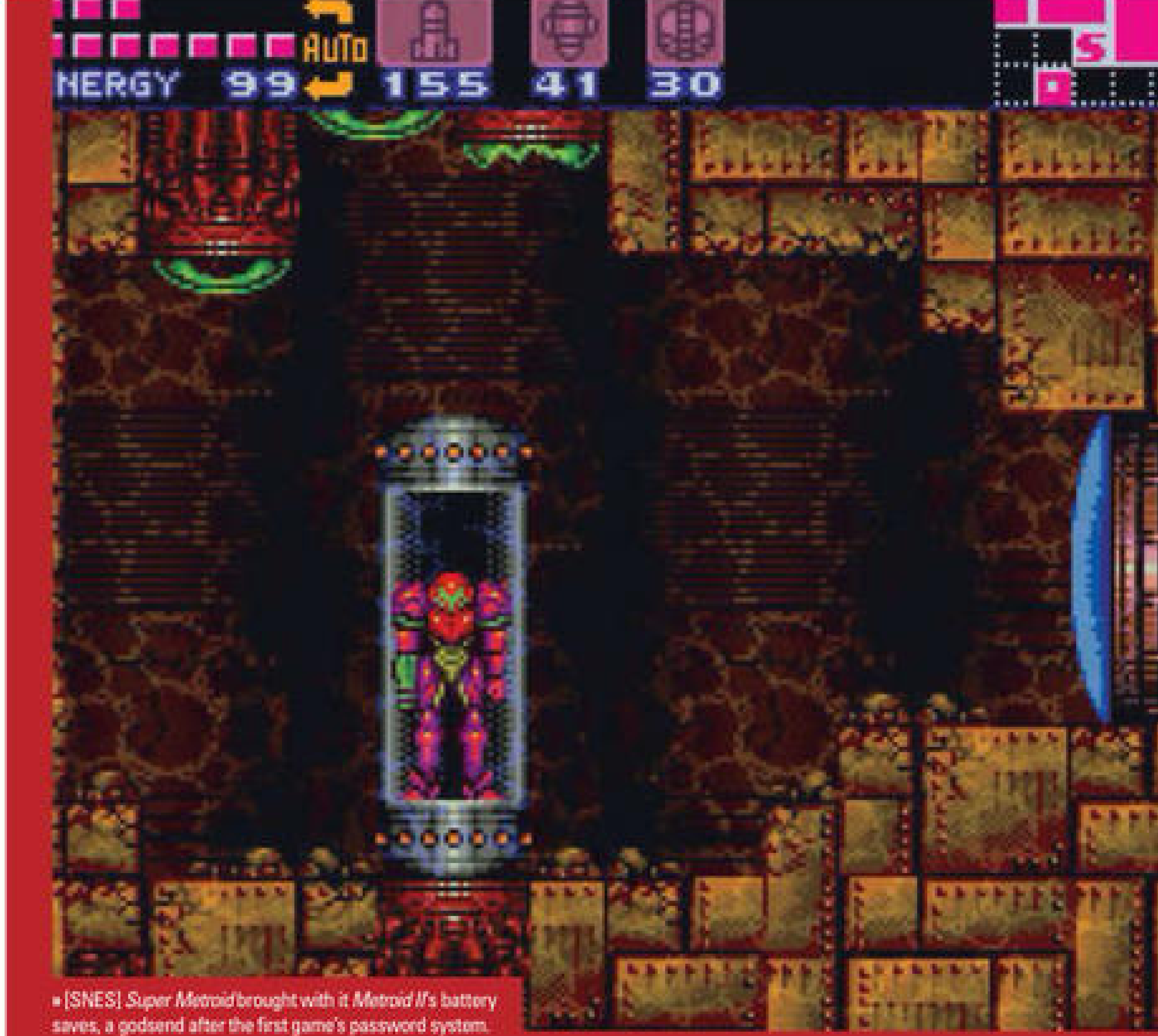
Aside from the basic formula of play that was set in motion by *Metroid*,



» [SNES] Zebes was an atmospheric setting, with a variety of environments given life by the new SNES hardware.



» [SNES] The iconic Morph Ball has its roots in the lo-fi NES's inability to convincingly animate a crawling Samus.



» [SNES] *Super Metroid* brought with it *Metroid II*'s battery saves, a godsend after the first game's password system.

the code on that million-selling disk also plotted the aesthetic direction of the series. I suggest to Sakamoto-san that *Super Metroid* and the *Metroid* games in general don't look like 'typical' NCL games and I ask him why that might be. He sips his tea and then replies: "I think the film *Alien* had a huge influence on the production of the first *Metroid* game. All of the team members were affected by HR Giger's design work, and I think they were aware that such designs would be a good match for the *Metroid* world we had already put in place. To be honest, I've never really been clear on what is or isn't the 'Nintendo look', but as far as we were concerned, we were just projecting another image from within Nintendo – another face of Nintendo, if you like. But yes, it's a science-fiction game, so…"

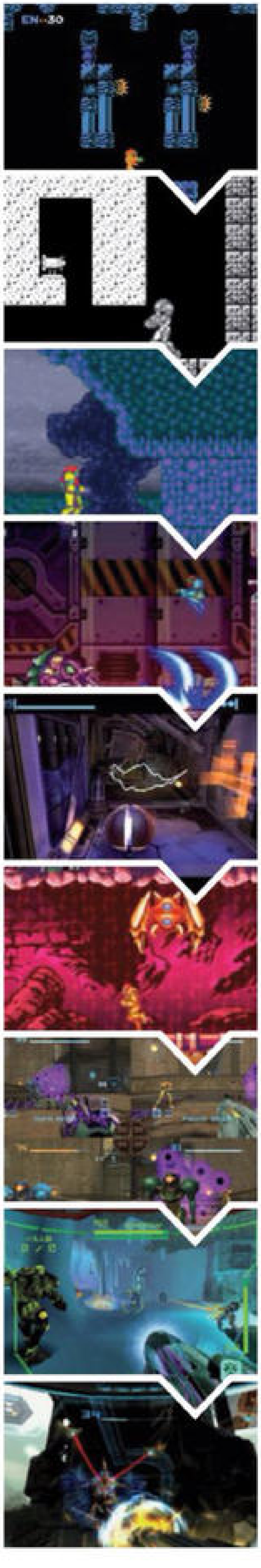
Other than the artistic influence of Necronom, Sakamoto reckons that numerous games affected the style of *Super Metroid* – "I can't list them… There are just too many of them" – although he counters this by highlighting the experimental side of his team's early work: "For the prototype stage of *Super Metroid*'s development we just had a few Intelligent Systems programming staff, myself, and another [in-house] Nintendo designer. We examined what was possible in the game, and as the core *Metroid* system was already in place we considered how we could make the game easier to play, what new ideas we could incorporate, and so on… Then we drafted in lots of other NCL and IntSys developers once we got beyond that stage and into the proper work."

There has always been a complex yet mutually beneficial relationship between Nintendo, then based in Higashiyama (to the northeast of the current Minami location), and Intelligent Systems, constantly situated in the eastern Kyoto ward of Higashiyama. Sakamoto refers to the team as "IntSys" and says that it had been helping Nintendo with the *Metroid* series since the initial FDS game, "as a second-party developer". While it's fair to say that the game design and play-testing abilities of NCL's in-house staff have always been some of the world's best, Intelligent Systems' developers were on hand to provide indispensable technical know-how, particularly focused on the hardware side of things.

"IntSys has always been very capable with hardware," Sakamoto adds, "so during the experimental stage we told the IntSys programmers what kinds of things we wanted to do and verified what in reality could be done. We'd been well prepared for the move to the Super Famicom hardware, so we had some idea of what to expect before we went into it; which features we should use, and how. I think it was good that we went through the prototype stage because it gave us a base onto which the post-

> **"The nap room wasn't being cleaned at all. One morning staff woke us up and told us that the room smelled like a zoo"**

Series highlights



Metroid

(FDS/NES/GBA – 1986)

The *Metroid* series was born on disk, not cartridge. It began life as this 1986-vintage Famicom Disk System title before migrating to the silicon of NES carts for consumption in the West. Videogames' first internationally famous heroine was born here. (An emulated version can be found in the GameCube release of *Metroid Prime*.)

Metroid II: Return Of Samus

(Game Boy – 1992)

This monochrome curio transported Samus to the Metroid homeworld of SR388, its dramatic finale providing Sakamoto and team with a bridge into the events of *Super Metroid*. It may not be as pretty as its relatives, but *Return Of Samus* remains an essential experience for the family's admirers.

Super Metroid

(SNES – 1994)

Arguably the finest game in the *Metroid* series, this 16-bit creation brought 2D adventure gaming to a new level of sophistication. *Super Metroid*'s pacing and world design are by all measures perfect, and there are so many aspects to explore here that the game retains its unique allure 15 years on.

Metroid Fusion

(GBA – 2002)

Taking the *Super Metroid* template into the 21st Century, and again with Yoshio Sakamoto at the creative helm, *Metroid Fusion* found Samus once more facing the destruction of a game world. Only this time Samus was the knowing perpetrator.

Metroid Prime

(GameCube – 2002)

Retro Studios' first-person adventure spin on the *Metroid* template sold 1.5 million copies in the United States alone, yet it simultaneously pushed Samus Aran away from Japanese sensibilities, guaranteeing a future of Western success at the cost of *Metroid*'s Japanese heritage. *Prime*'s unusual perspective and restrained style of first-person play carved out a niche for Samus in the next generation, cleverly sidestepping the FPS genre to find new ground.

Metroid: Zero Mission

(GBA – 2004)

Zero Mission's retelling of the first *Metroid* game brought with it a *Fusion*-standard graphical upgrade. By this stage Samus's popularity in her homeland was at an all-time low, and sales didn't reach six figures in Japan; a shame, as *Zero Mission* was even better than the FDS original.

Metroid Prime 2: Echoes

(GameCube – 2004)

The first *Metroid* game to feature a multiplayer mode, although its inclusion was perhaps ill-advised, as it failed to really add anything of worth to the traditional single-player adventure. *Echoes*' greatest successes were in translating more of Samus's abilities to a 3D context.

Metroid Prime: Hunters

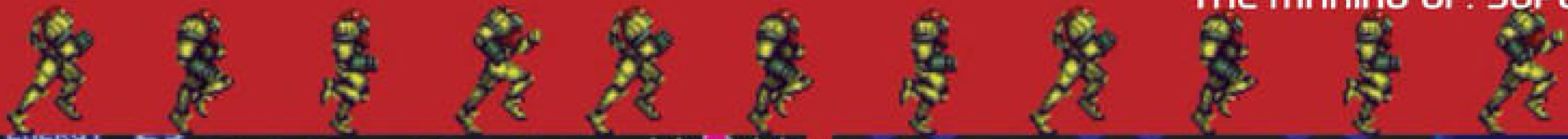
(DS – 2006)

Developed by NST, the outfit behind titles such as *Ridge Racer 64* and *Wave Race: Blue Storm*, *Hunters* was one of the better first-person DS games, with a multiplayer mode that felt more natural than that of *Echoes*. However, compared with joypad-controlled *Metroid* predecessors, *Hunters*' touch-screen controls resulted in a slightly lower-than-average level of overall satisfaction.

Metroid Prime 3: Corruption

(Wii – 2007)

The final release in the *Prime* trilogy effectively brought the modern *Metroid* experience closer in line with the FPS genre, combining Remote-directed shooting and relentless action.



TIME
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» [SNES] The open-ended gameplay meant that *Super Metroid* has become popular for speed runs.

experimental stage staffers could easily begin their work. At the time, the SFC was reputed to be difficult to develop for. Depending on how you partitioned the Super Famicom's video RAM, which looked after the sorting of image information, the scope of possibilities would change wildly. Knowing that you could diminish the VRAM's potential by poor partitioning was useful information, because it meant we could think about how certain things could or couldn't be achieved, and how we could work around those limitations. As we were migrating from the Famicom to Super Famicom, really everyone – not just Nintendo but other developers too – seemed to be having fun testing the feature set of the new hardware. That went for us, too: I remember often thinking, 'Oh, I had no idea we could even do this!' The graphics and sound were fantastic, but we were still driven by wanting to [not] be outdone by the arcade games of the time."

To a man, the developers supplied by IntSys to work on *Super Metroid* were all programmers. In spite of the various backgrounds of the *Super Metroid* team, there was apparently no NCL-IntSys rivalry; no factions, just harmony and productive co-operation. Key team members from the Nintendo side included Makoto Kanoh, the producer, the guy who instigated the project; my interviewee, Yoshio Sakamoto, who was the director in charge of game design; and Tomomi Yamane, who was the figure Sakamoto regards as having been the 'main' designer: "He was very skilled and was particularly interested in the hardware stuff, consulting with the IntSys people as to what kind of images could be displayed."

Even though the team's objective was to build on the success of *Metroid* and *Metroid II*, only three of the original *Metroid* team, including Sakamoto himself, worked on *Super Metroid*: "The rest of the [NCL side] was made up of young trainee developers," he recalls. "Of course young people can be quite impertinent – and those on the *Super Metroid* team certainly were – but I think that's quite important in a way. These young people had enough about them to help us a lot. There were many different personalities in the *Super Metroid* team, which was a good thing. It was a harsh development environment, so I'm sure that some of the staff didn't enjoy the work, but generally the team was full of the 'Let's go for it!' spirit. I think that was partly because of the timing as well, what with the Super Famicom pushing everything to the next level."

The "next level" wasn't merely the notion of advanced graphics and sound: it was also a matter of the expansion and improvement of level design. However, Sakamoto and team were reluctant to drag *Super Metroid* into the realm of storytelling methods utilised by RPGs and other adventure games. "We really didn't want to explain things to the player using too many words," Sakamoto states. "We just wanted to let them play and be able to work things out for themselves. For example, say there's a mechanism where you need to climb up a ladder and place a bomb there in order to advance, as one component in the solution of a [gameplay] riddle; if that was all you needed to do in order to get through to the next area, you'd miss all of the other mechanisms we'd put in place and wouldn't even realise that certain parts of the game existed. We wanted players to explore everything we'd made and then move on. That's why we designed the maps in such a way that the player couldn't escape without exploration, or in such a way that the player would end up back at a starting point before advancing. The player would be cornered/driven and would eventually be forced to stop and say, 'Right, how should I think about this area?' That's the essential point of *Super Metroid*'s map design. Not using words meant

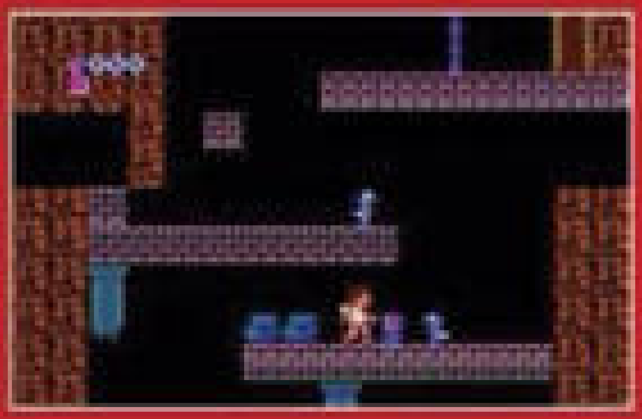
» [SNES] *Super Metroid* used the full range of special effects available to the SNES for its bosses and environments.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

DONKEY KONG JR
SYSTEM: ARCADE, FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM/NES, ETC
YEAR: 1982

KID ICARUS (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: FDS/NES, GBA
YEAR: 1986

METROID
SYSTEM: FDS/NES, GBA
YEAR: 1986



that the player had to 'feel' his/her way through the game – and that's how we wanted it to be. When they discovered something new – a new item or new location – we wanted the player to feel that he/she had made that discovery independently, without help from the game."

R&D1 went to great pains to achieve the fine balance seen in *Super Metroid*'s item locations, puzzles, boss encounters, and in Samus's acquired abilities and inventory use. It wasn't simply the case that everything fell into position at the first attempt at design either, as Sakamoto reveals: "In a stage following on from an area where the player made lots of discoveries, we'd hold back from pushing the player too far in order to avoid repetition. Balance between difficulty level and player discoveries was crucial. We wanted to avoid creating an on-rails experience – we wanted the player to feel free. But it was incredibly difficult to get that balancing act right. We'd been designing levels in this way since the first game, so we had a lot of experience but we still needed to experiment and build and rebuild."

As well as being a *Metroid* debut for most of the team, *Super Metroid* marked the Super Famicom debut for all concerned. Naturally, this step up presented some hurdles that even the advice of IntSys couldn't equip the team to surmount. "One problem with the shift to the Super Famicom," Sakamoto says, "was that it meant we suddenly needed a lot more sprites and artwork, so we shared the map and enemy design responsibilities throughout the team, with everyone making some input in those areas. But then doing that resulted in a complete mishmash of styles because of each designer's individual preference, so in the end I had to ask Yamane to retouch everything that had been submitted, bringing it all together as one consistent design."

Remarkably, there was no friction within the team even during the frenzied last stage of development, although there was something of a bad smell: "During the final six months of development I didn't know where I lived any more; the Nintendo building – not here, but the old place [in Higashiyama] – became like a boarding house for the *Super Metroid* team," Sakamoto grins. "It got to the stage where I really don't remember going home at all! There was a nap room where it was okay to sleep, but sometimes it was full [of sleeping, overworked *Super Metroid* staff] – those were the worst times, when I wanted to sleep but couldn't, and I didn't have time to go home! There were always between ten and fifteen of us in the office through the night, so we had to take naps in turns. The nap room wasn't being cleaned or looked after at all, because we were always using it; one morning staff from another area came to wake us up and told us that the room smelled like a zoo. Another Nintendo employee put a room freshener in the nap room, but that only made the place pong even worse. Everyone in Nintendo gave us funny looks," Sakamoto laughs. "It's quite sad having only these kinds of memories!"

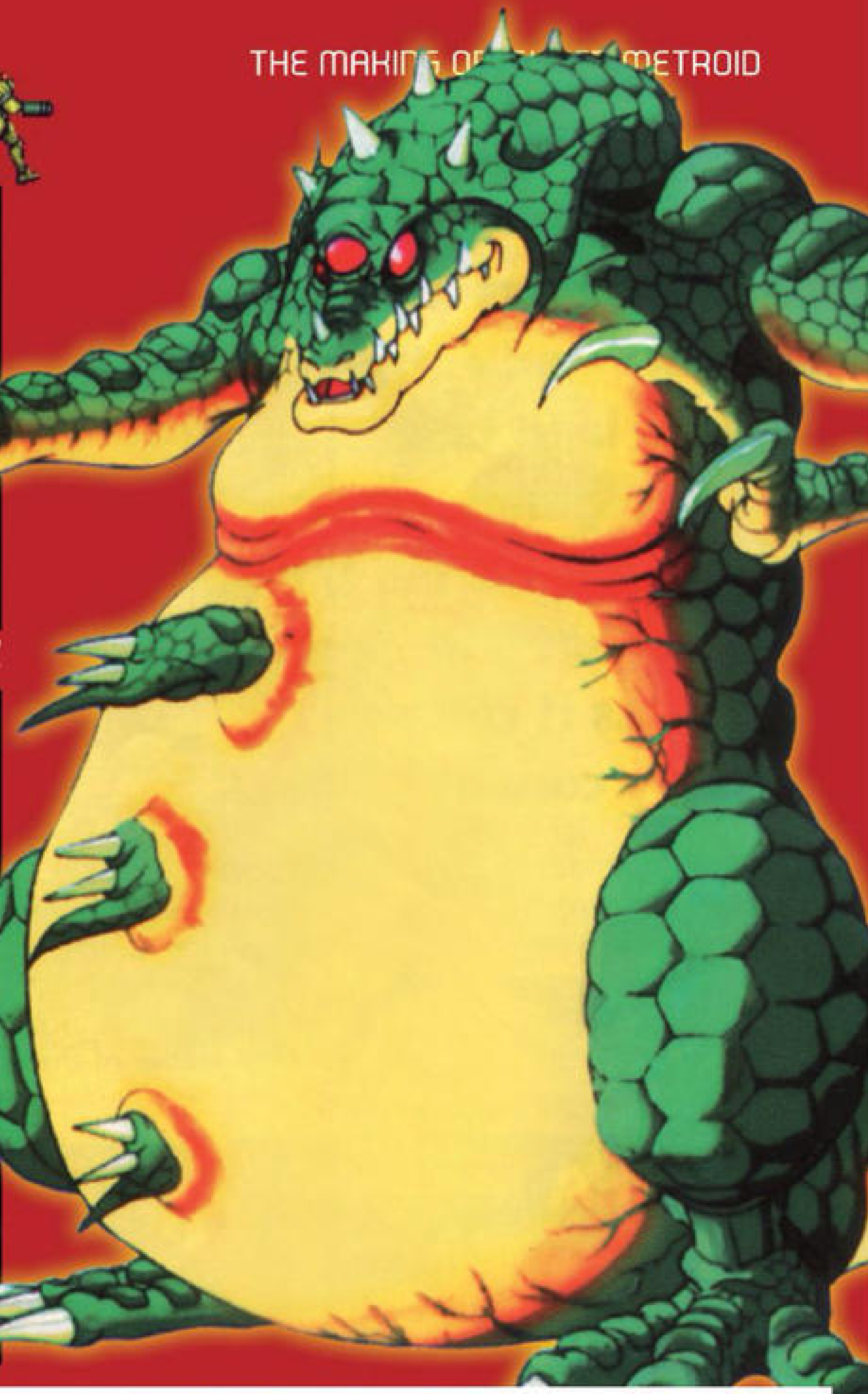
> **"We didn't want to explain things to the player. We wanted to let them be able to work things out for themselves"**

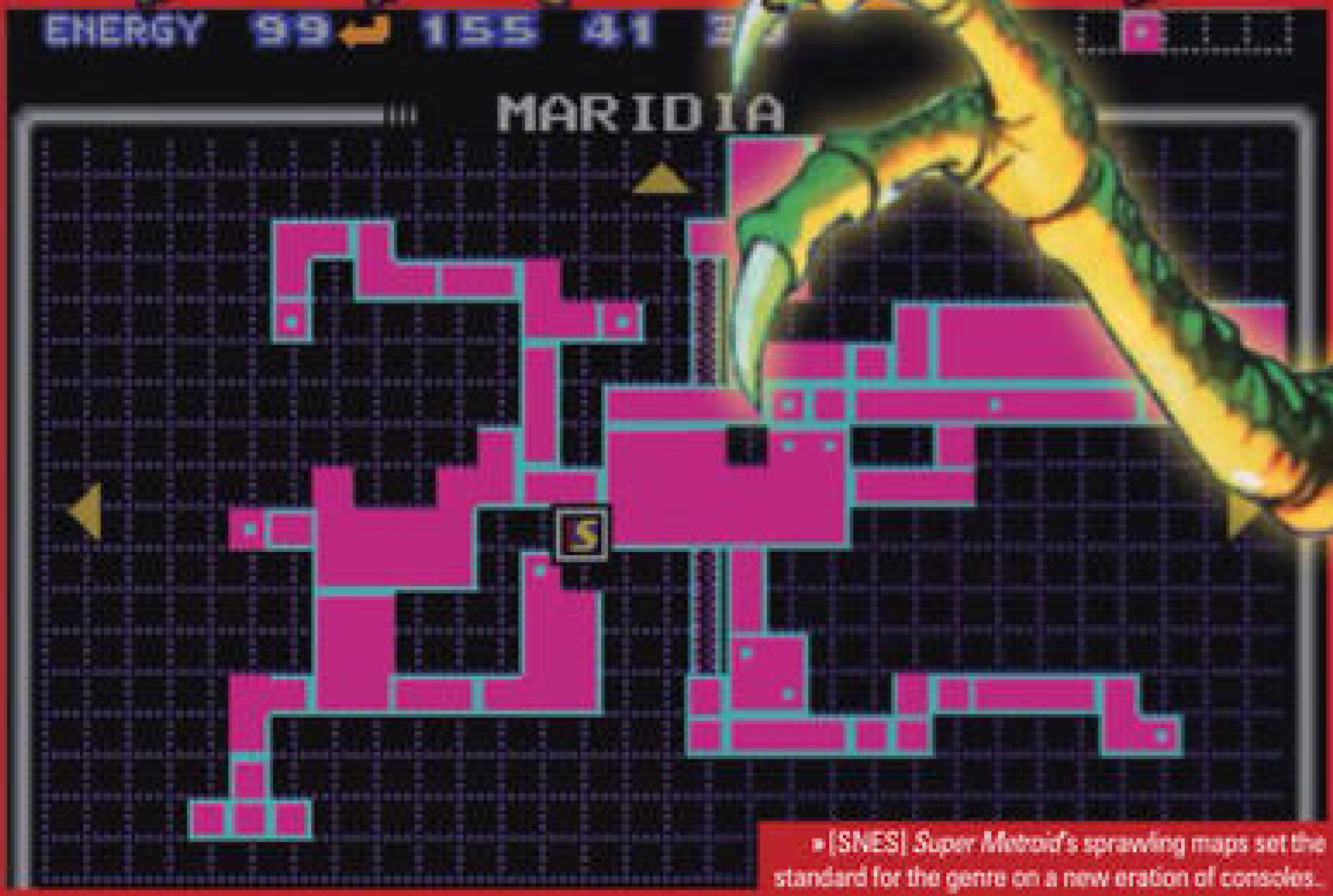
Our talk soon takes a turn from development room stench to the wrath of a Nintendo demigod: Gunpei Yokoi. In his early 50s at the time of *Super Metroid*'s production, Yokoi was the game's general project manager but did not exercise any hands-on control. Sakamoto remembers how his superior viewed *Super Metroid*: "Yokoi-san, who at the time was my section chief and who always had fresh ideas, was always angry when he saw us all completely absorbed and working crazy overtime on *Super Metroid*. He came in and said, 'Are you lot trying to produce a work of art or something?' [Laughs] But this was an epic and we were already way past our deadline, and it seemed we were getting progressively further from our objectives – Yokoi-san was becoming angrier with us day by day during that period. We weren't aware of it, but Kanoh was given a warning by Yokoi-san. Although he was really unhappy with us, and even though he wasn't the type to dish out praise, Yokoi-san was constantly playing *Super Metroid* once we'd finished it – he was hooked. He was playing it so much that I wondered what he was up to. [Laughs] When other developers brought their action games to Nintendo, he'd always compare them with *Super Metroid* and invariably ended up recommending the third-party developer to 'go away and play *Super Metroid*'. That's how fond he was of our game. I suppose this is a better memory than the smelly nap room anecdote," Sakamoto laughs.

"*Super Metroid* was released in '94," he continues, "and development had taken us between two and three years. I don't know how it was perceived throughout the company, but the timing was such that all teams were focused on putting out lots of new SFC games, so there was obviously some expectation that we deliver with *Super Metroid*. We definitely had a lot of support and understanding of the game's concept from people related with the project, and that helped to ensure that we did a good job." Which, as everyone who has played the classic game will quickly attest, is a monumental understatement indeed.

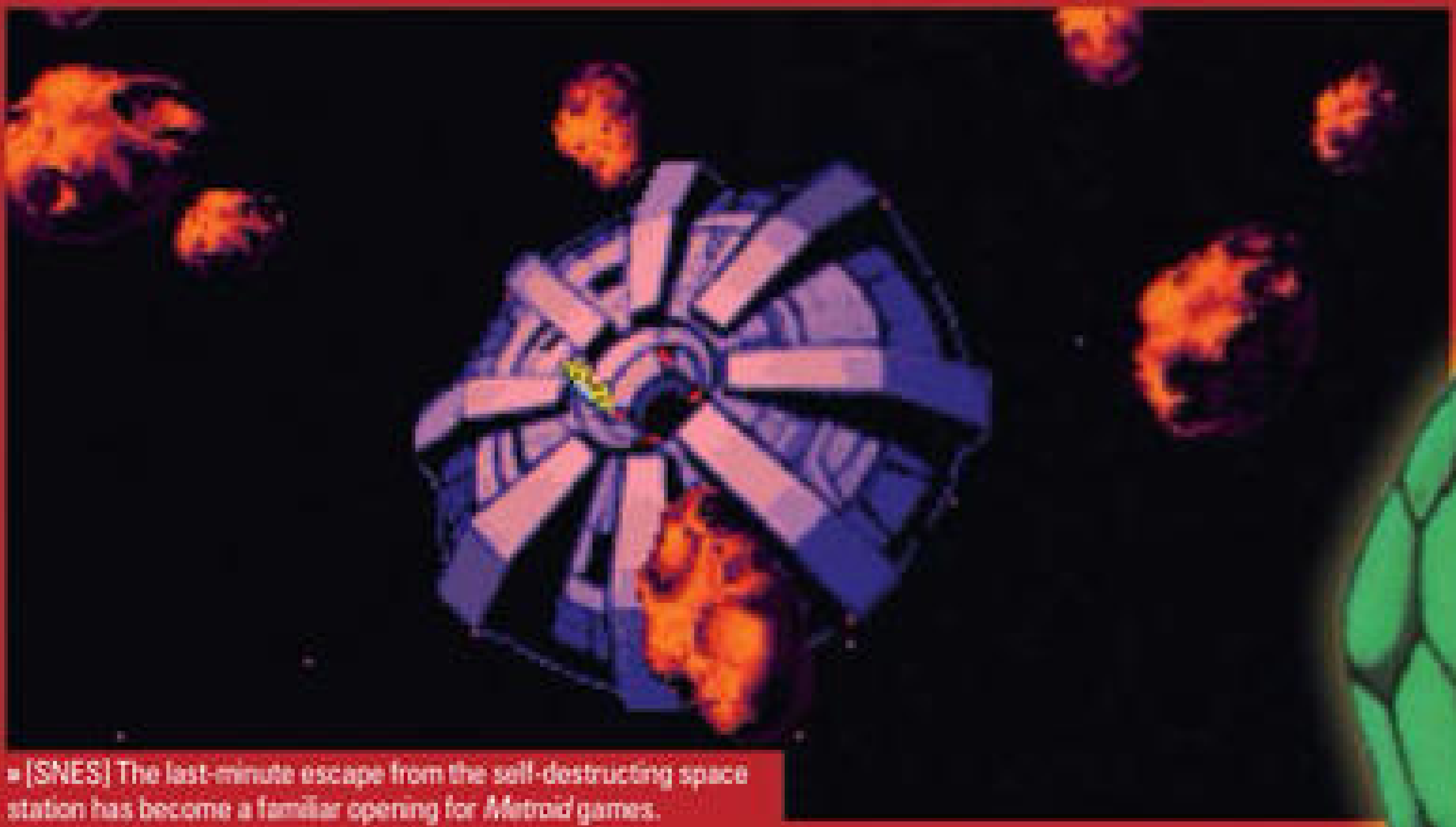
24 megabits, 7 modes

"We used all seven of the hardware modes available," Sakamoto tells me, although he doesn't explain precisely what that means. And how did you use the 24-meg cartridge that ended up housing *Super Metroid*, I ask? "I can't remember!" Sakamoto laughs. There's a pause. "We achieved wonderful graphics and sound by dedicating most of the memory to those features. Yes. Oh, and the game's maps were also quite large, I think. We made good, balanced use of the 24 megabits, anyway – that much I know for sure."

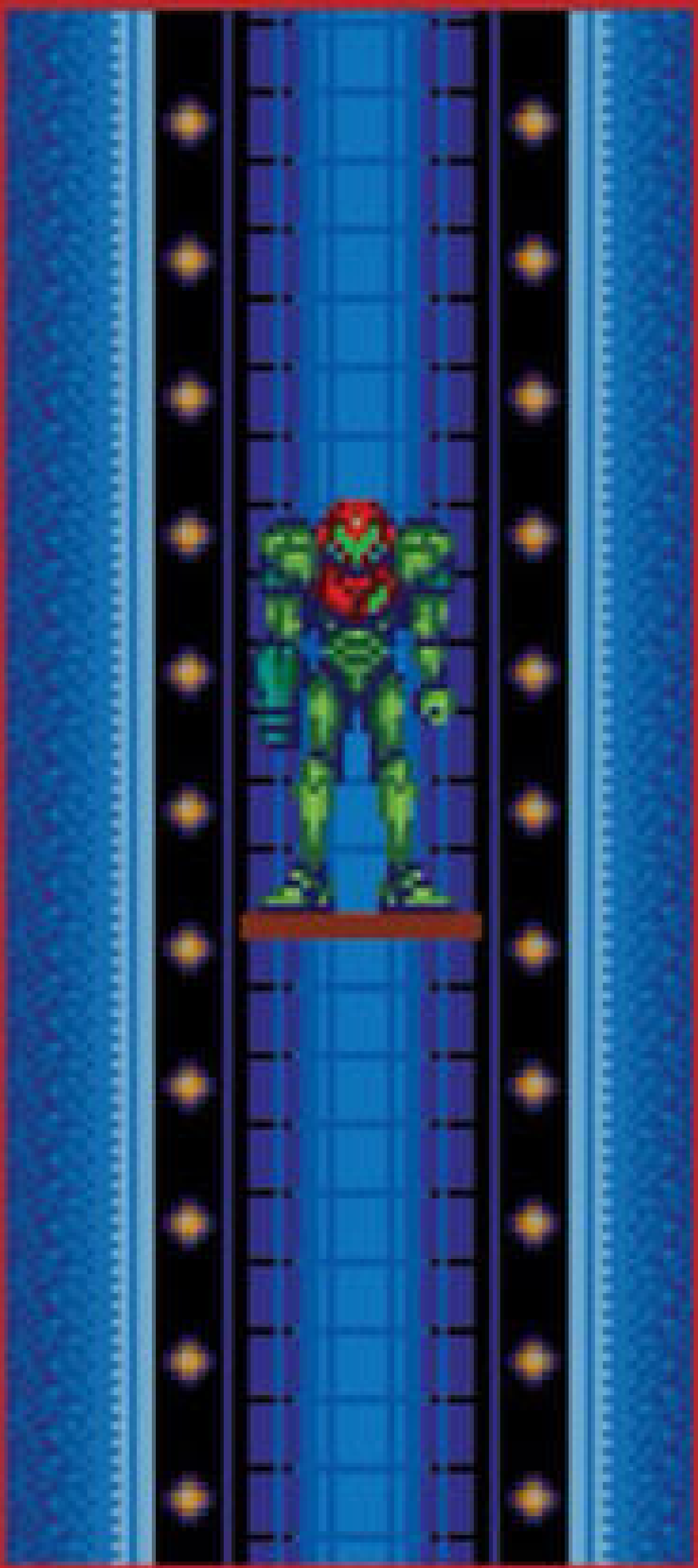




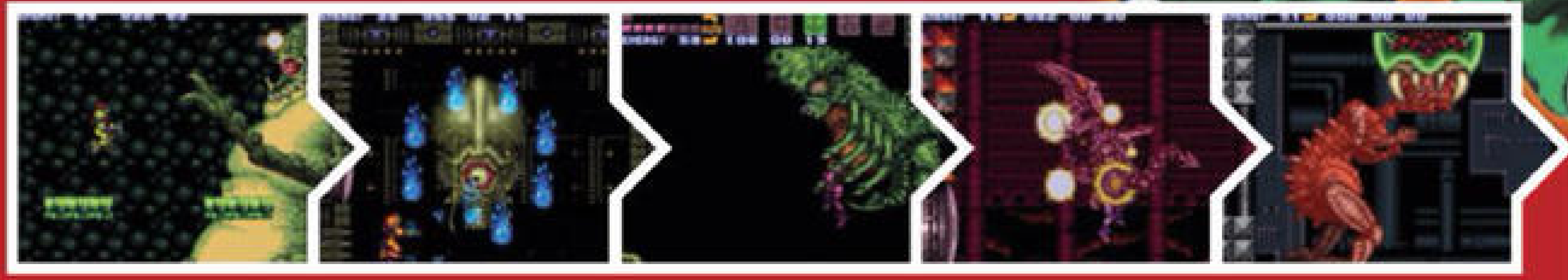
» [SNES] *Super Metroid*'s sprawling maps set the standard for the genre on a new eration of consoles..



» [SNES] The last-minute escape from the self-destructing space station has become a familiar opening for *Metroid* games.



» [SNES] The way in which new abilities open up new areas has been often copied since *Super Metroid*'s release.



The big bosses

Kraid
This first major boss character is literally a monster: he probably missed out on a role in the Chewits adverts purely because he was overqualified. Kraid's weak point is his gob, although he uses his whole being to launch quasi-organic thorns and fireballs in Samus' direction.

Phantoon
A good example of the Super Famicom hardware's transparency effects, Phantoon at times appears to be an apparition; this boss's trick is to flit between protected translucency and a devastatingly powerful solid state, and he likes to launch endless rounds of flaming blue orbs.

Draygon
This yellow-bellied, oversized crustacean is more than just a simple typo. Draygon is a mean swimmer, and its weak points are protected by the shell of a giant lobster. Slightly perversely, *Super Metroid* encourages you to vanquish Draygon by electrocuting it until its flesh turns purple.

Ridley
An homage – in name alone, obviously – to *Alien* director Ridley Scott, whose film was a major inspiration to the series, this senior Space Pirate appears once at the start of *Super Metroid* and again, in more powerful – yet paradoxically more vulnerable – form, towards the end of the game.

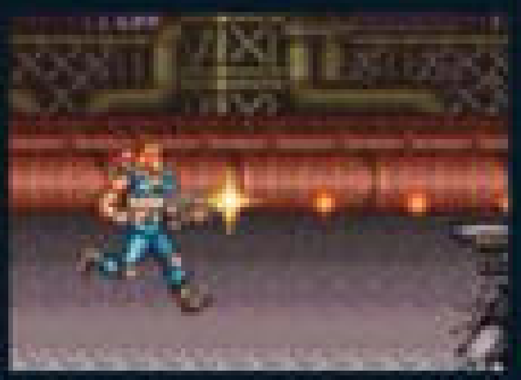
Mother Brain
The enigmatic final boss of *Super Metroid* is essentially a lump of deskulled brain. However, Mother Brain protects itself with dynamic weapons and the glass casing of a robo-suit, and when that fails, it connects to the neck of a bio-mechanical bodysuit. Afterwards, Samus again has to run for her life.

THE CLASSIC GAME

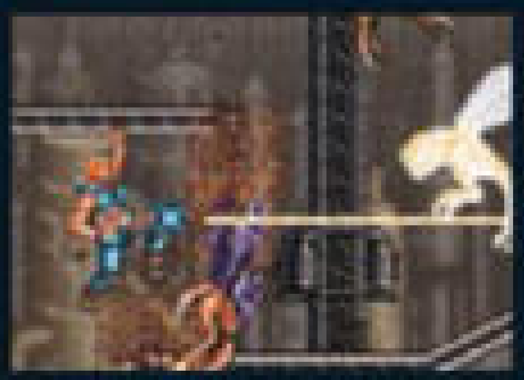
CONTRA III
THE ALIEN WARS

It's without doubt one of the greatest Super Nintendo games of all time, one of the best games in the *Contra* series, and also one of the finest run-and-gun games ever. Oh, and did we mention that it's one of the best games ever too? That it's taken us 89 issues to finally give *Contra III* a classic game analysis is somewhat strange, but the reason lies in the fact that the game is so exceptional that we just assumed we already had. A masterclass in game pacing, set pieces and basically just great level design, from the very minute you start *Contra III* to the sweaty, jubilation-filled second you finally beat it on the hardest setting and see the game's ending, the action is relentless, the challenge high and the gameplay intense. The year is 2636, and Stuart Hunt is helping two commandos, Sully and Jimbo, win an epic alien war.

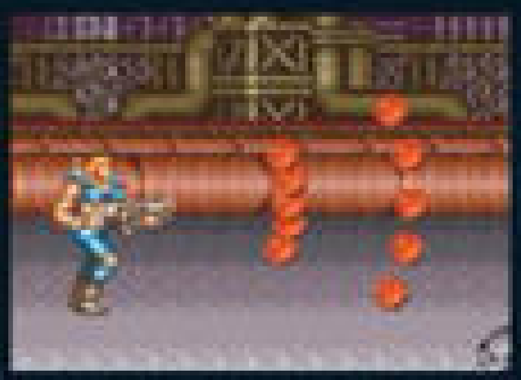
THE ARMOURY



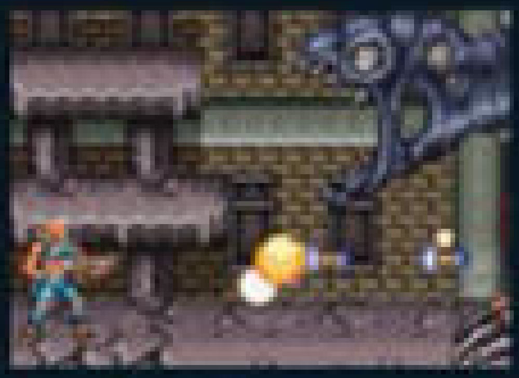
Machine gun
The default weapon in the game. It's pretty powerful and really quite effective at taking out much that the game throws at you.



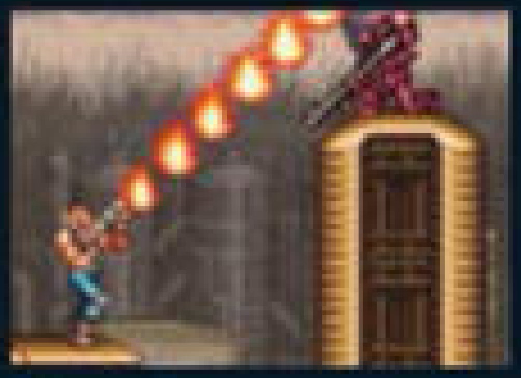
Laser
As laser-based weapons do, this fires a concentrated line of powerful radiation. It's highly powerful, but using it requires a good aim.



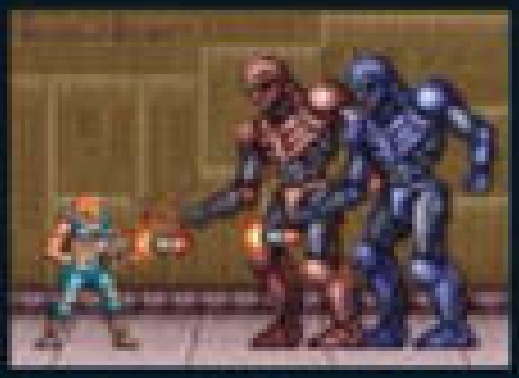
Spread gun
Though the weakest weapon in the game, the spread gun makes short work of enemies attacking from different heights.



Crush missiles
Blue in colour, these are the most powerful weapons in the game. They explode on contact, and are really effective against bosses.

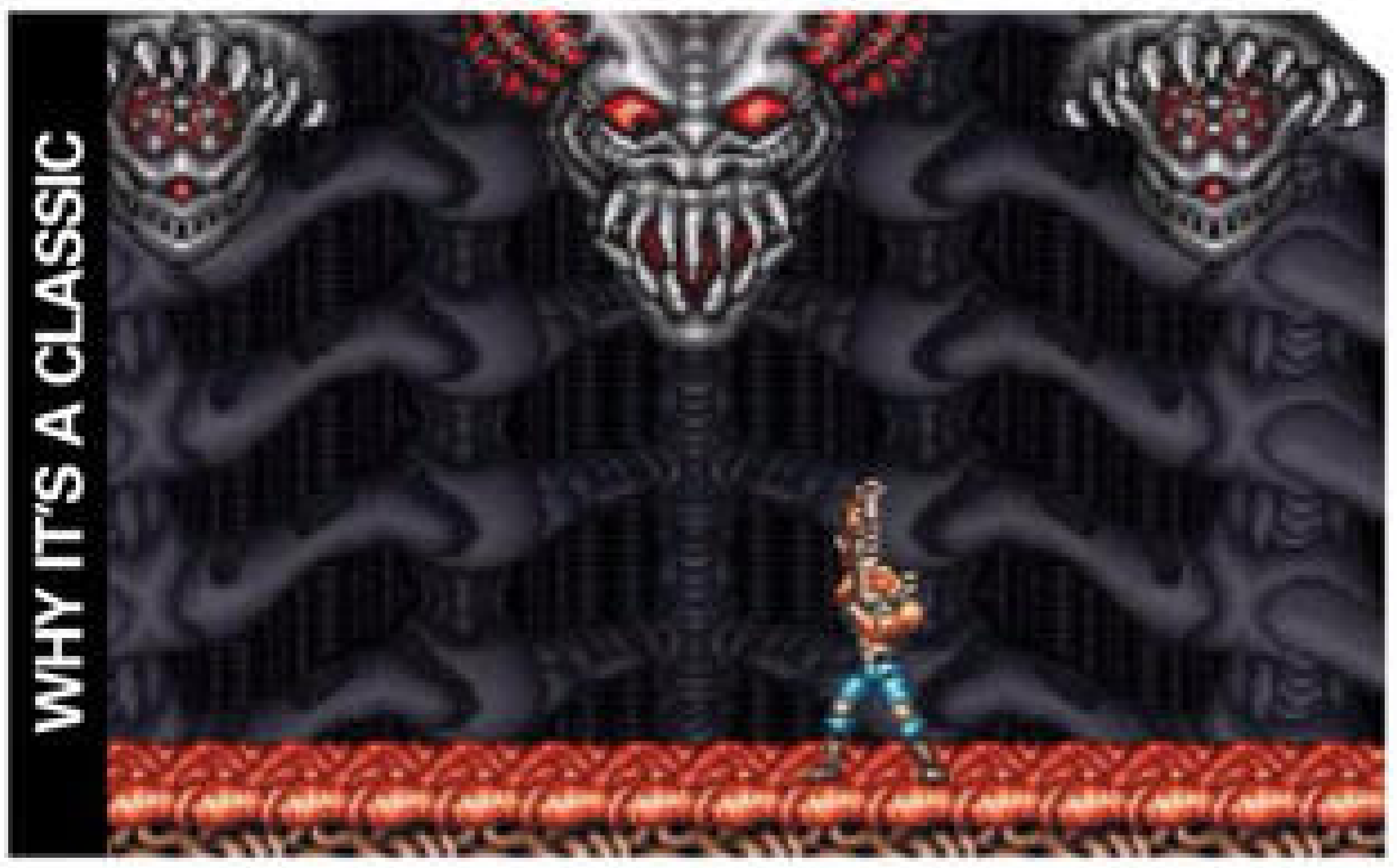


Flamethrower
The flamethrower is an effective close-quarters combat tool that is great for taking down bosses and cindering weak spots.



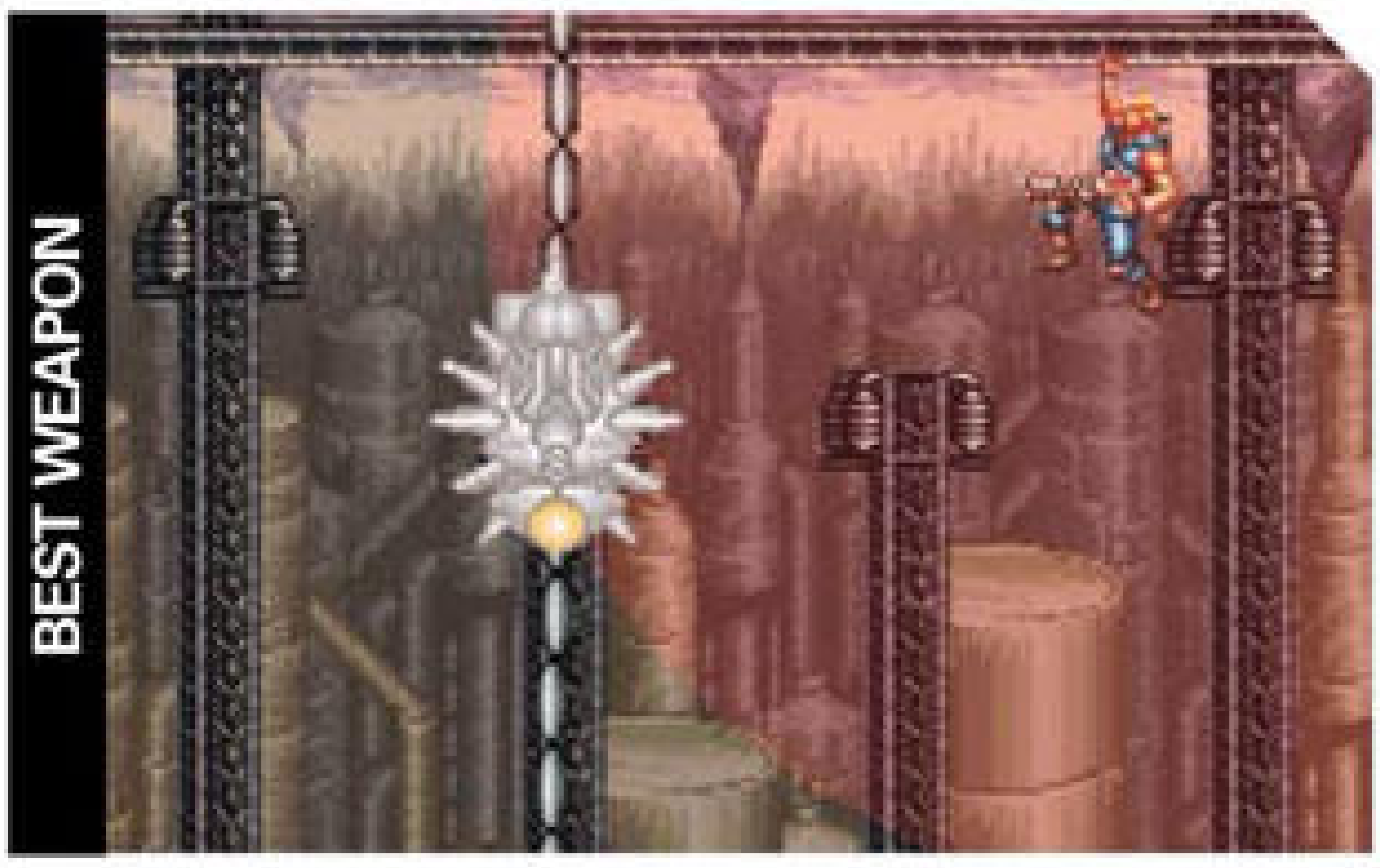
Homing missiles
Moderately powerful homing missiles will hunt enemies down. It's a really effective weapon against the airborne aliens.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS



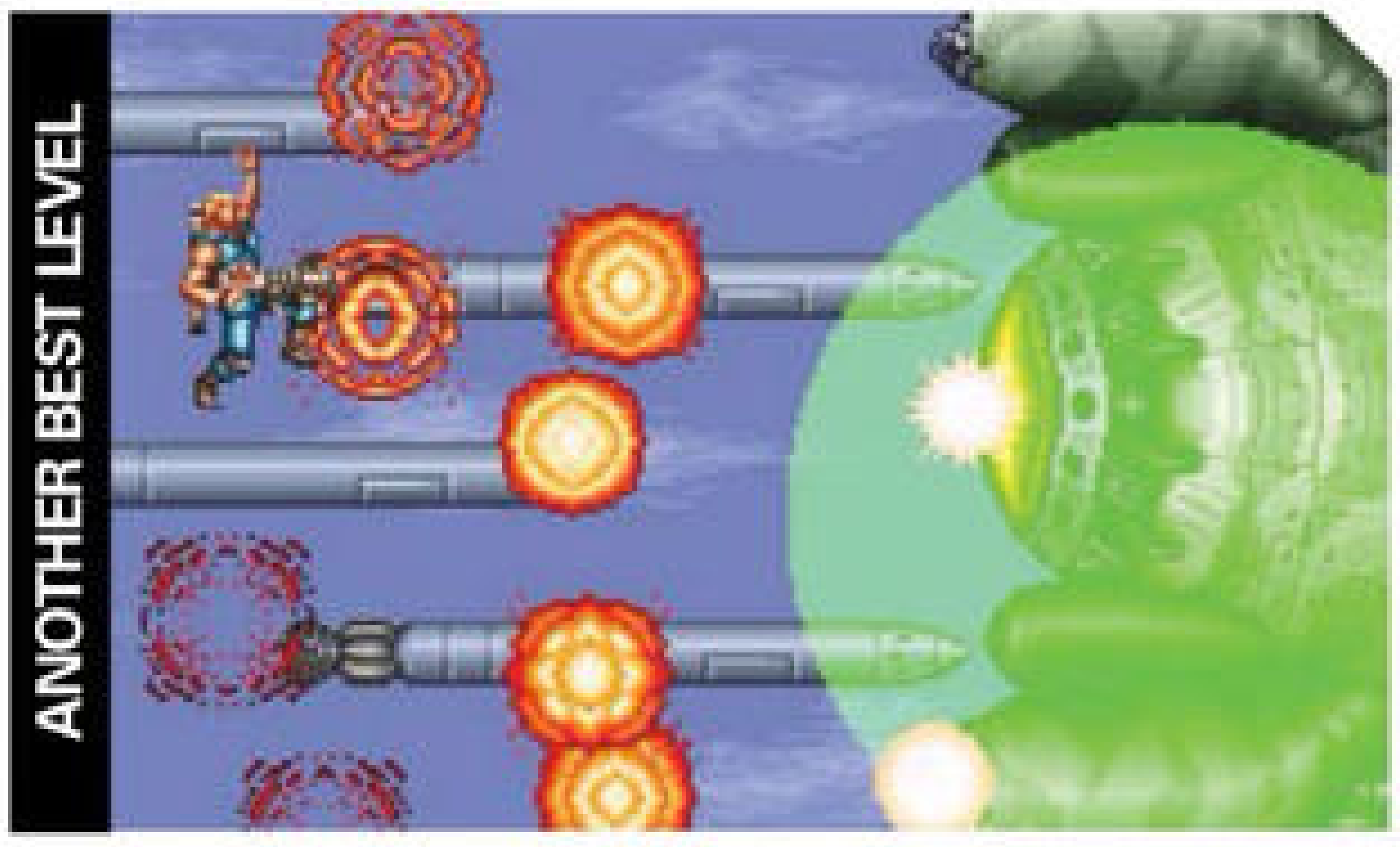
Contra just got better

The original *Contra* reinvented the run-and-gun genre, introducing many elements that countless games adopted. The follow-ups prior to *Contra III* offered a decent helping of action, but they didn't measure up to the original. *Contra III*, however, marked a giant leap forward. It was everything you would expect from a *Contra* game, but with bigger weapons, bigger explosions, bigger bosses, a new post-apocalyptic setting and a motorcycle level. Set piece after set piece, the game was a tour de force of imagination, deft level design and special effects that hasn't aged a single day.



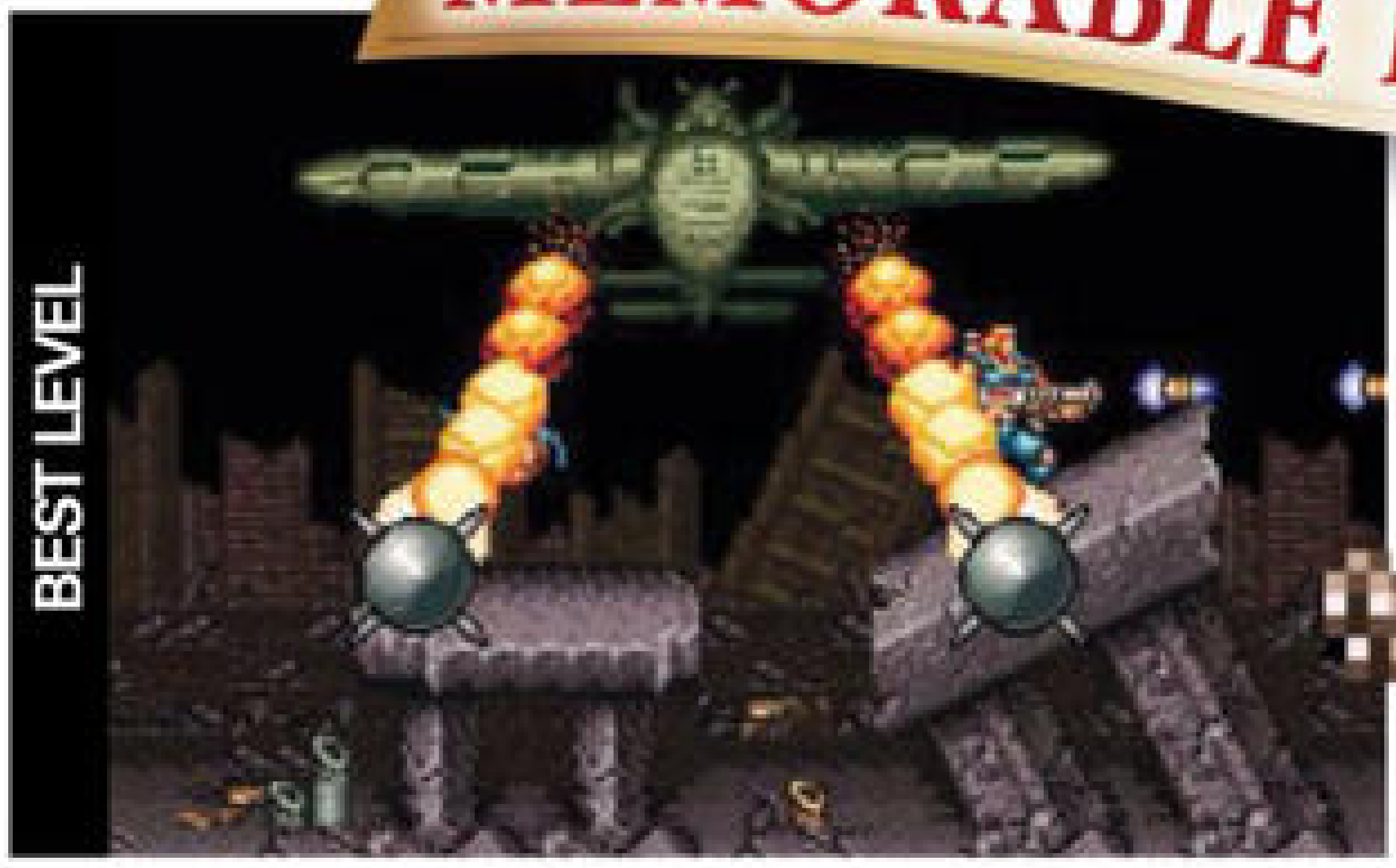
Smart bomb

Many fans will have their favourite weapon. Some love the laser. Others will like the weaker but lovely spread gun, as it makes killing foes an absolute breeze. There are others who will like the flamethrower, as it's great for when you get up close. Therefore, picking a best weapon is a bit of a thankless endeavour, and one we chickened out of by virtue of us going with the smart bomb. It might look like a metal turnip, but release it into the game's atmosphere and see the screen turn hazy, killing grunts with ease and knocking a large chunk off the energy of the game's bosses.



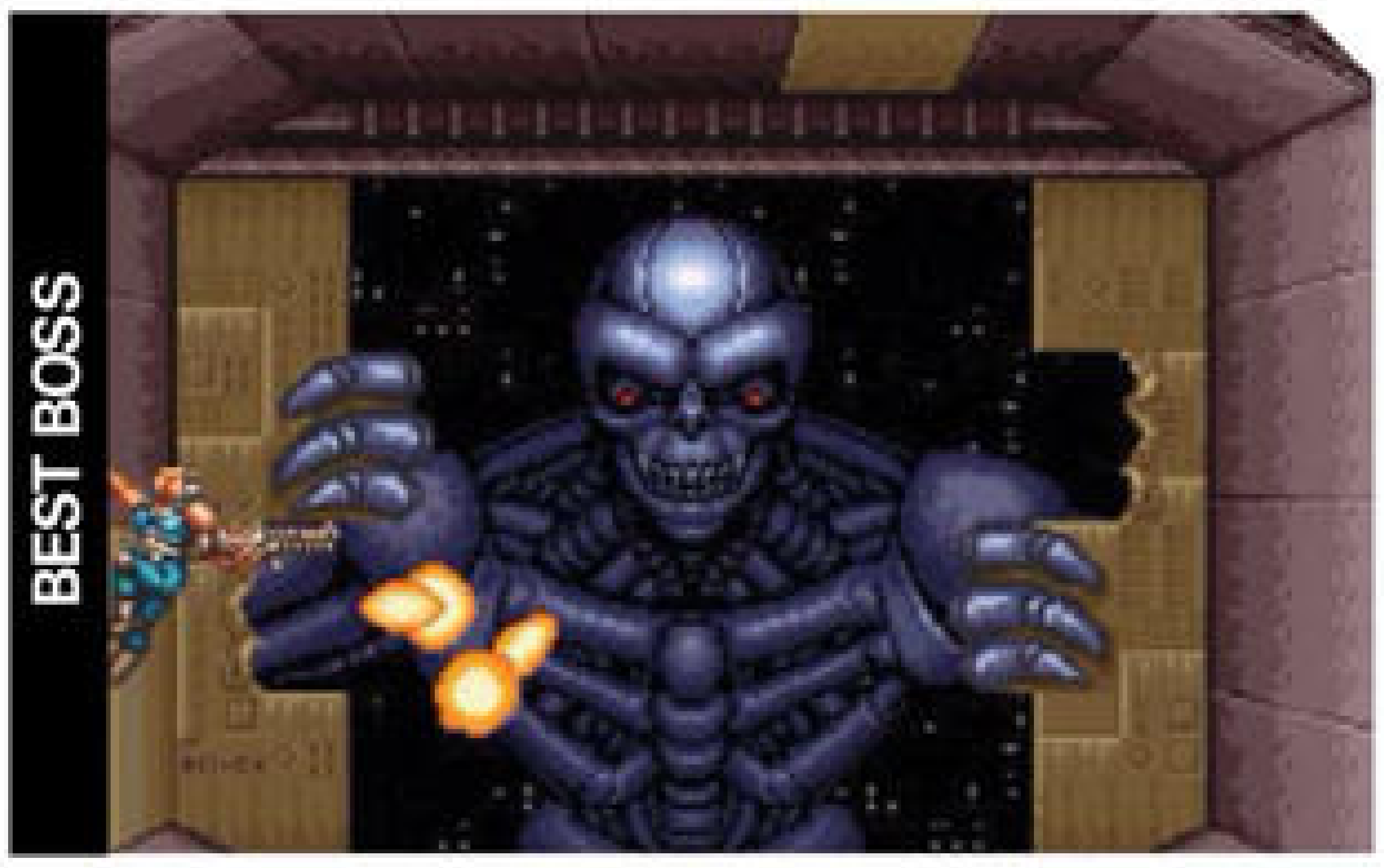
Motorcycle

Given that there are so many great action set pieces in *Contra III*, we had to give a mention to another of its fantastic levels. The motorcycle stage deserves a look in, as it's basically just one giant action set piece. The stage begins with the player astride a 2636 era Ducati, blasting flying aliens before a giant frigate appears, its undercarriage primed with heavy ordnance. Survive this vicious gauntlet and the ship takes to the air, you chasing after it. This leads on to the most insane bit in the entire game: blasting the ship's glowing arse while hopping between missiles being fired at it.



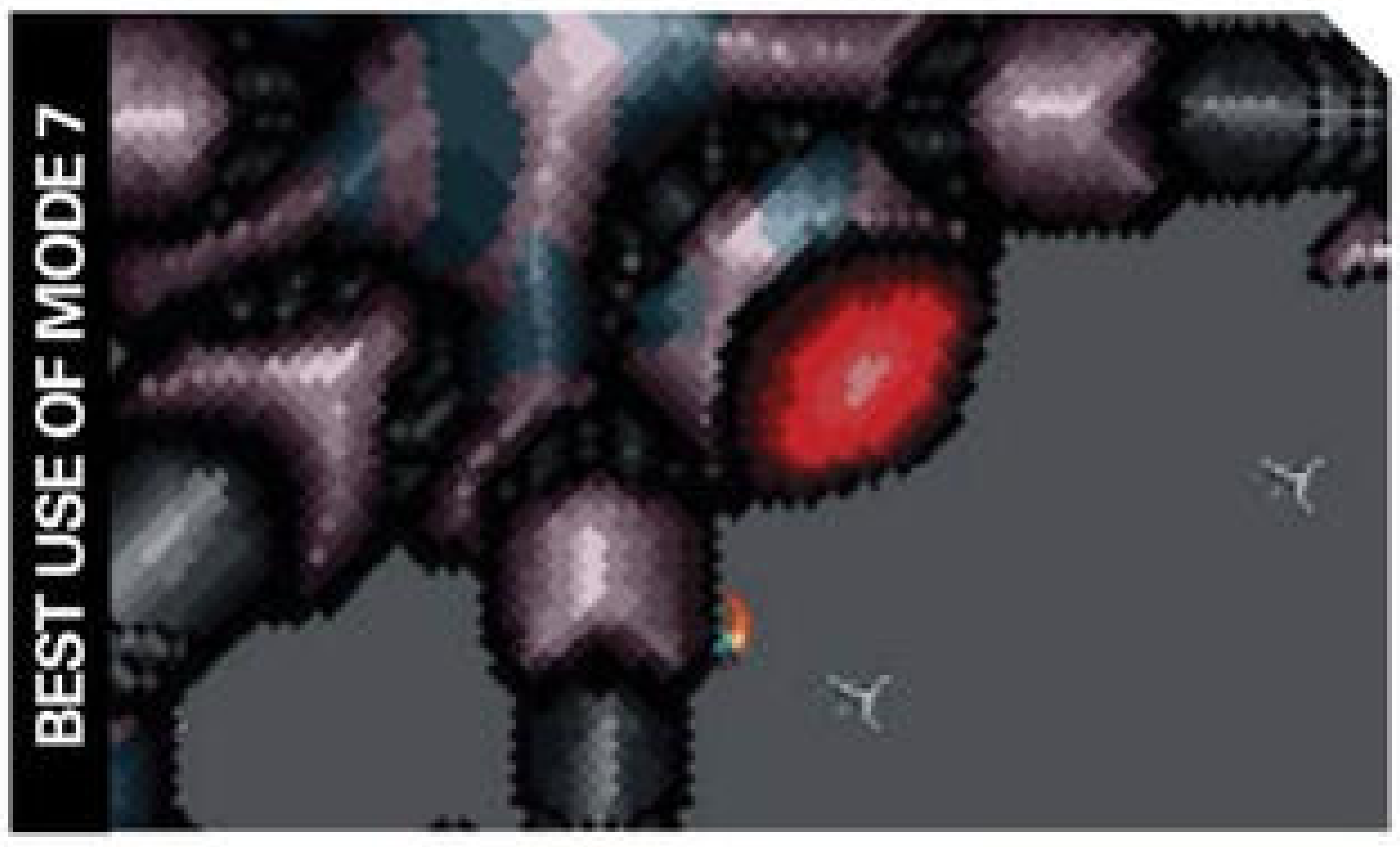
Start as you mean to end

With so many memorable moments in *Contra III*, picking just one was impossible. As the opening stage is a great example of how to grab a teenager's attention and make them part with birthday money, we had to mention it. Within the first few minutes you're gunning down aliens and mutant dogs, hopping into a tank to flatten foes, sampling nearly all of the weapons in the game, dodging a plane as it bombs the city, jumping through the flaming ruins while taking out a wave of winged aliens and finally facing off against a giant, bullet-spewing alien tortoise. It's one of the best opening levels of any videogame.



The massive Terminator

There really was only one boss we could highlight here. And typical of memorable 16-bit bosses, it is something that didn't exactly err on the side of caution as far as copyright was concerned. The giant T-800-alike that rips through the level's wall at the end of the third stage is a tricky one. First, you see his claws pierce the wall, pulling it apart as if it was made of tinfoil, before seeing his beaming red eyes glowing in the darkness. The beast then emerges, firing lasers from its eyes, lobbing bombs into the playing field and breathing fire too. The only thing it doesn't do is ride a motorcycle and shoot up a police station.



Arachnophobia

From the map in *A Link To The Past* to pseudo-3D like *F-Zero* and *Pilotwings*, the cream of early Super Nintendo games used the console's Mode 7 technique to show off the power of the console, and *Contra III* was no different, proving a great showcase of the versatility of the effect. It was used to create dazzling explosions, two top-down levels, and also several bosses. The first Mode 7 boss is a large robotic spider that scuttles along the floor before jumping into the air, scaling bigger and filling the screen before disappearing, and then making a quick descent in a bid to crush Sully and Jimbo.

CONTRA III
THE ALIEN WARS
1 PLAYER
2 PLAYERS A
2 PLAYERS B
OPTION

IN THE KNOW

- **PLATFORM:** SUPER NINTENDO
- **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **RELEASED:** 1992
- **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

What the press said… ages ago

MEAN MACHINES

Mean Machines 95%
Anyone who doubts the abilities of the Super NES should take a look at this – it's unbelievable! The graphics, sounds, special effects and varied, highly addictive gameplay are all absolutely outstanding.

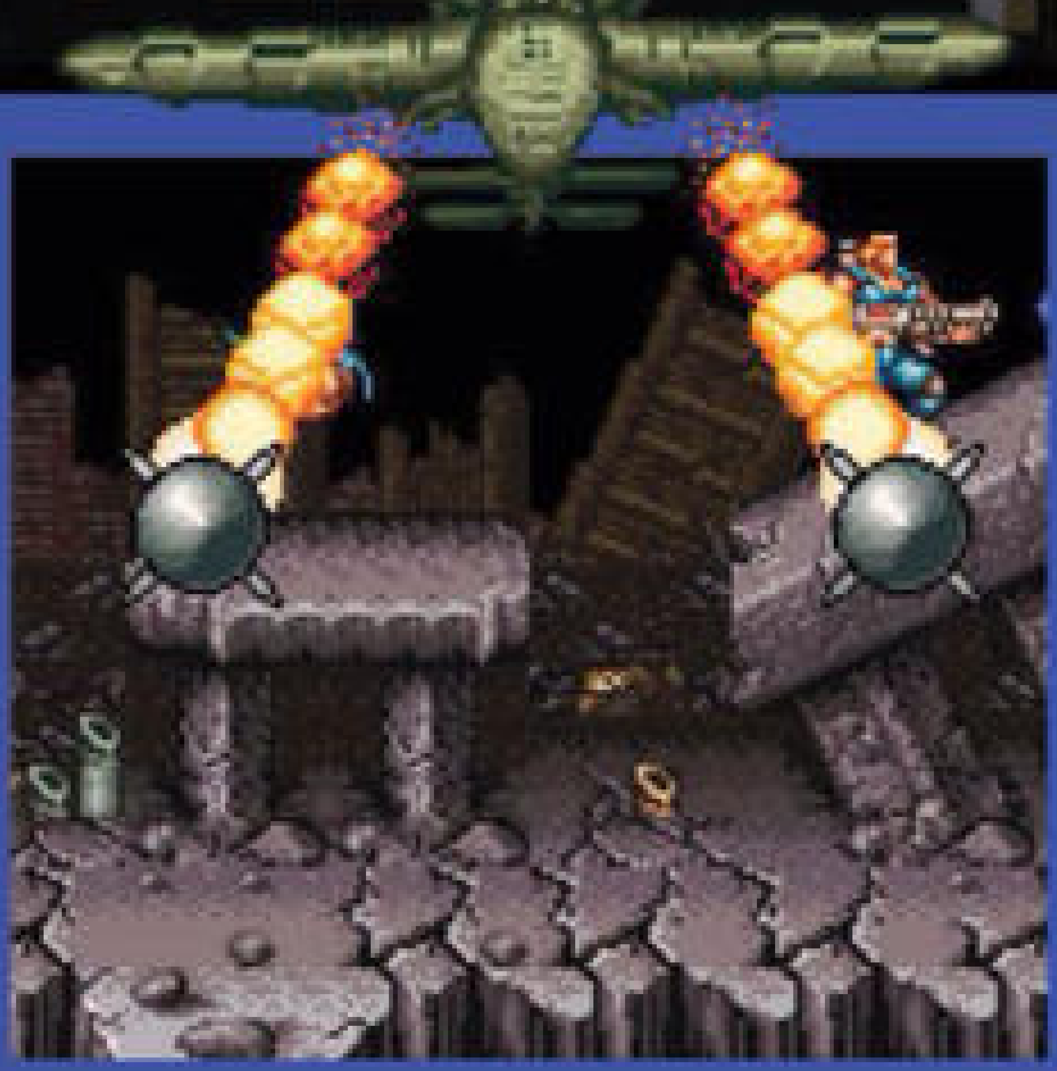
What we think

Standing alongside *Gunstar Heroes* and *Metal Slug*, *Contra III* is the pinnacle of run-and-gun gaming, and has still yet to be bettered. It's an outstanding game.

SUPER NINTENDO
SUPER MARIO KART
Nintendo
SNSP-MK-EUR
SNSP-006
SUPER NINTENDO
SUPER NINTENDO ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM
X
A
Y
B
SELECT
START

MODE 7 HEAVEN

We look back at some of the best and lesser-known examples of Mode 7, the famous graphics mode that became a hallmark for many early Super Nintendo releases and helped elevate Nintendo gaming during the Nineties



Contra III: The Alien Wars

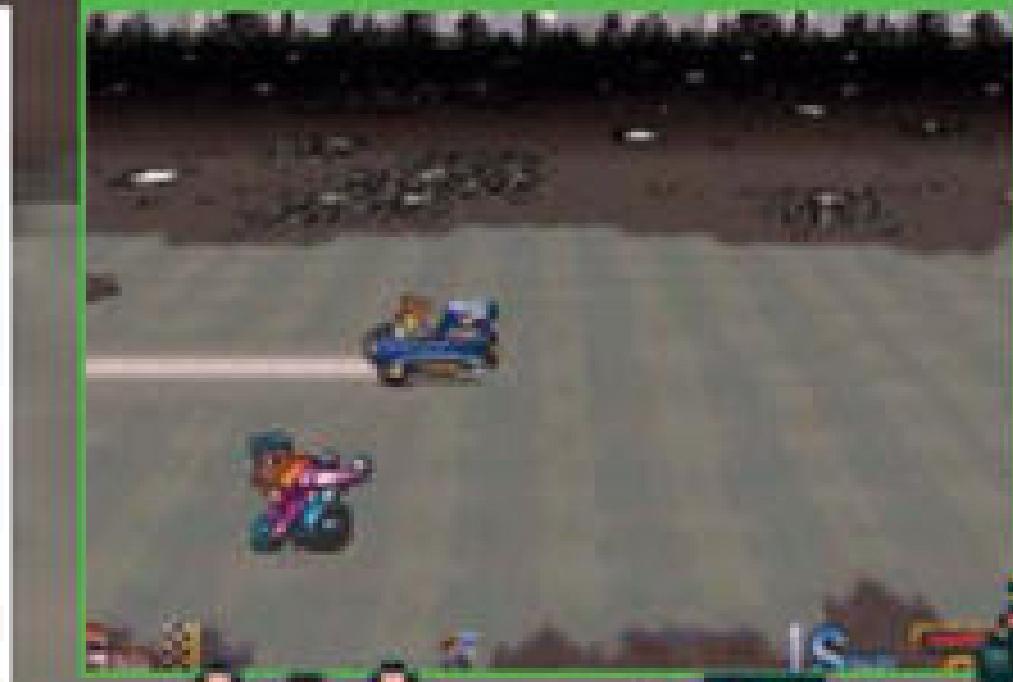
Best Mode 7 moment: The opening stage
Year: 1992
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-house

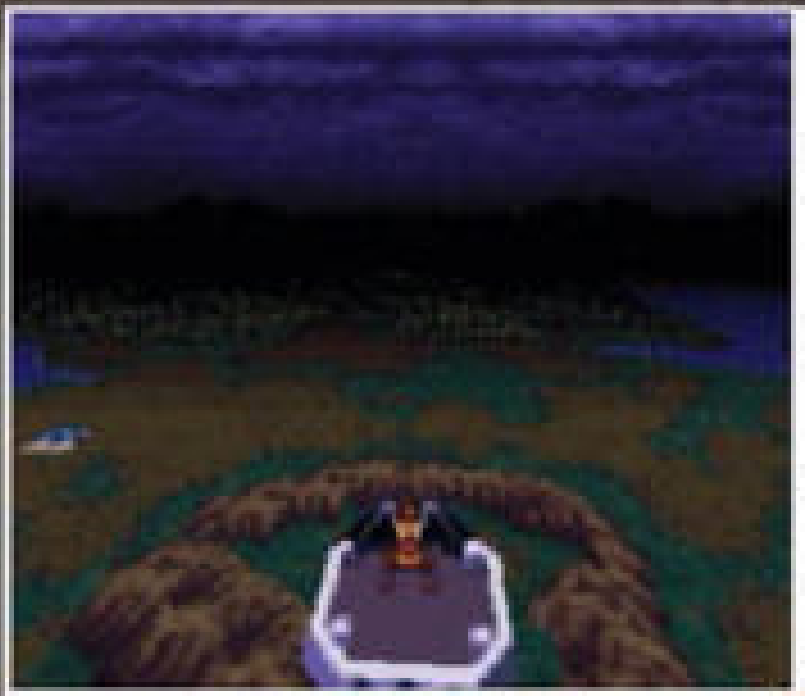
The foremost thing to remember about SNES Mode 7 is that its powers are ineffective on game sprites. However, Mode 7 can rotate and increase the size of background images to give the impression they're animated; to create a 'Mode 7 sprite' (a term we've just made up but feel is befitting). Developers are also able to go a step further by adding moving parts made of sprites to really mess with our heads. For two really good examples of this technique in action look no further than the epic first stage of *Contra III: The Alien Wars*, which is packed with Mode 7 moments. The low-flying plane that turns up midway through the game's first stage forms part of a background layer and is animated using Mode 7 (as it comes closer to the screen its size increases and its wings bank slightly). However, the bombs that it drops are sprites. Similarly, the body, neck and head of the turtle boss that awaits at the end of the stage also sits in the background, while the bullets it fires and moving legs are sprites. These are two of the best examples of Mode 7 being used by a developer to create believable animated objects in games.

Chrono Trigger

Best Mode 7 moment: The crazy racing mini-game
Year: 1995
Publisher: Squaresoft
Developer: In-house

There are many examples of Mode 7 being put to good use in Square's epic time-travelling RPG *Chrono Trigger*, but our favourite is the Jetbike mini-game found in the Beyond The Ruins future chapter. While most racing games use Mode 7 to generate into-the-screen tracks, *Chrono Trigger* shows the effect being put to use in a side-on racing scenario – although the shoulder buttons allow you to rotate the camera. The fun and challenging mini-game proved so popular among fans that Square later released a standalone digital version for the Sattellaview titled *Chrono Trigger: Jet Bike Special*.





Demon's Crest

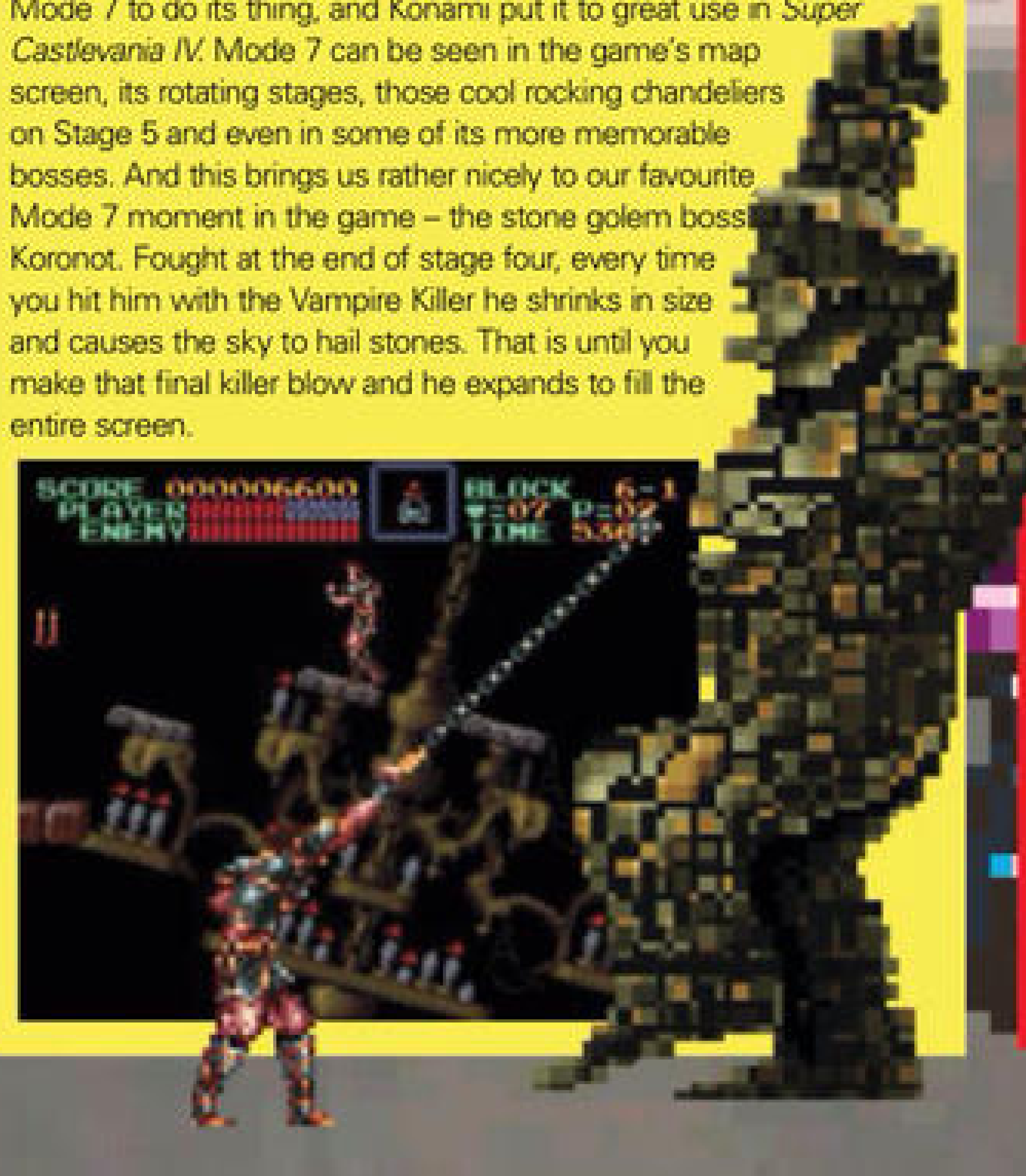
Best Mode 7 moment: Getting around
Year: 1994
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: In-house

Demon's Crest is a superb action/platformer that is every bit as atmospheric and challenging as its famous cousin *Ghosts 'n Goblins*. The third part of the excellent *Gargoyle's Quest* series, *Demon's Crest* made this list purely for its neat world map, which, thanks to some Mode 7 magic, allowed you to navigate and land on it *Pilotwings* fashion to replay stages.

Super Castlevania IV

Best Mode 7 moment: Fighting Koronot
Year: 1991
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-house

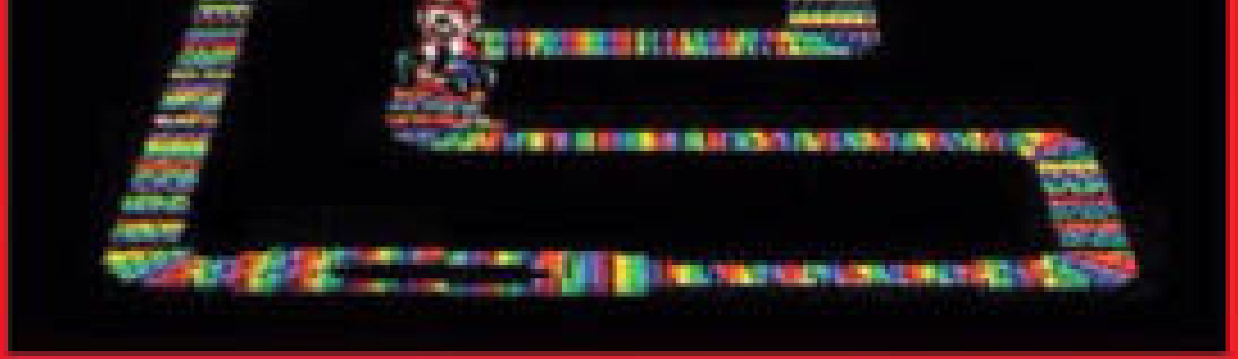
The nightmare world of *Castlevania* is the perfect environment for Mode 7 to do its thing, and Konami put it to great use in *Super Castlevania IV*. Mode 7 can be seen in the game's map screen, its rotating stages, those cool rocking chandeliers on Stage 5 and even in some of its more memorable bosses. And this brings us rather nicely to our favourite Mode 7 moment in the game – the stone golem boss Koronot. Fought at the end of stage four, every time you hit him with the Vampire Killer he shrinks in size and causes the sky to hail stones. That is until you make that final killer blow and he expands to fill the entire screen.

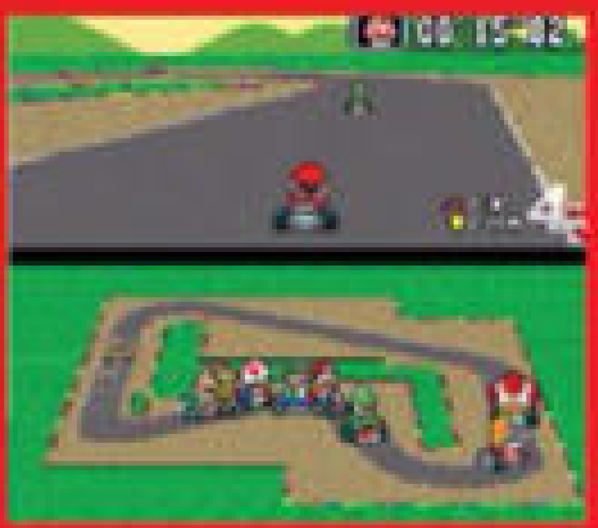


Super Mario Kart

Best Mode 7 moment: Rainbow Road
Year: 1992
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house

Though *F-Zero* was the first game to show the exhilarating things Mode 7 could bring to racing games, it was clear there was room for refinement. *F-Zero*'s glitzy, neon-coloured racer is certainly fast and pretty, but its racing gets shown up for being shallow when compared to *Super Mario Kart*. *Super Mario Kart* is *F-Zero* but with more intricate tracks, modes and sprites (characters, weapons, power-ups and annoying flat moles). It raised the bar of Mode 7 application, but it also spawned Nintendo's most successful-ever racing franchise. It would also be remiss of us to not mention that Mode 7 marks the first time the bright, vibrant and colourful world of the *Mario* franchise was presented in a way resembling believable 3D. That it was also immensely playable didn't do much to hurt its success either.



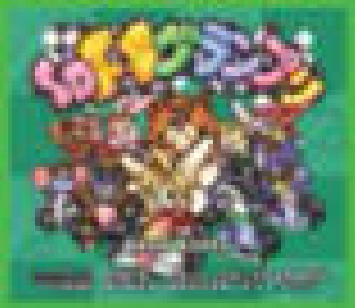


We expose blatant Super Mario Kart copycarts

Kat's Run

This obscure racer plays like a *Gran Turismo* take on *Super Mario Kart.* After picking your driver from the ten spiky-haired racers on offer, you select your vehicle and then compete in street races. Because *Kat's Run* is grounded in reality both visually and track-wise it suffers. With dull circuits and visuals, it is unfortunately one of the least impressive Mode 7 racers on Super Nintendo.

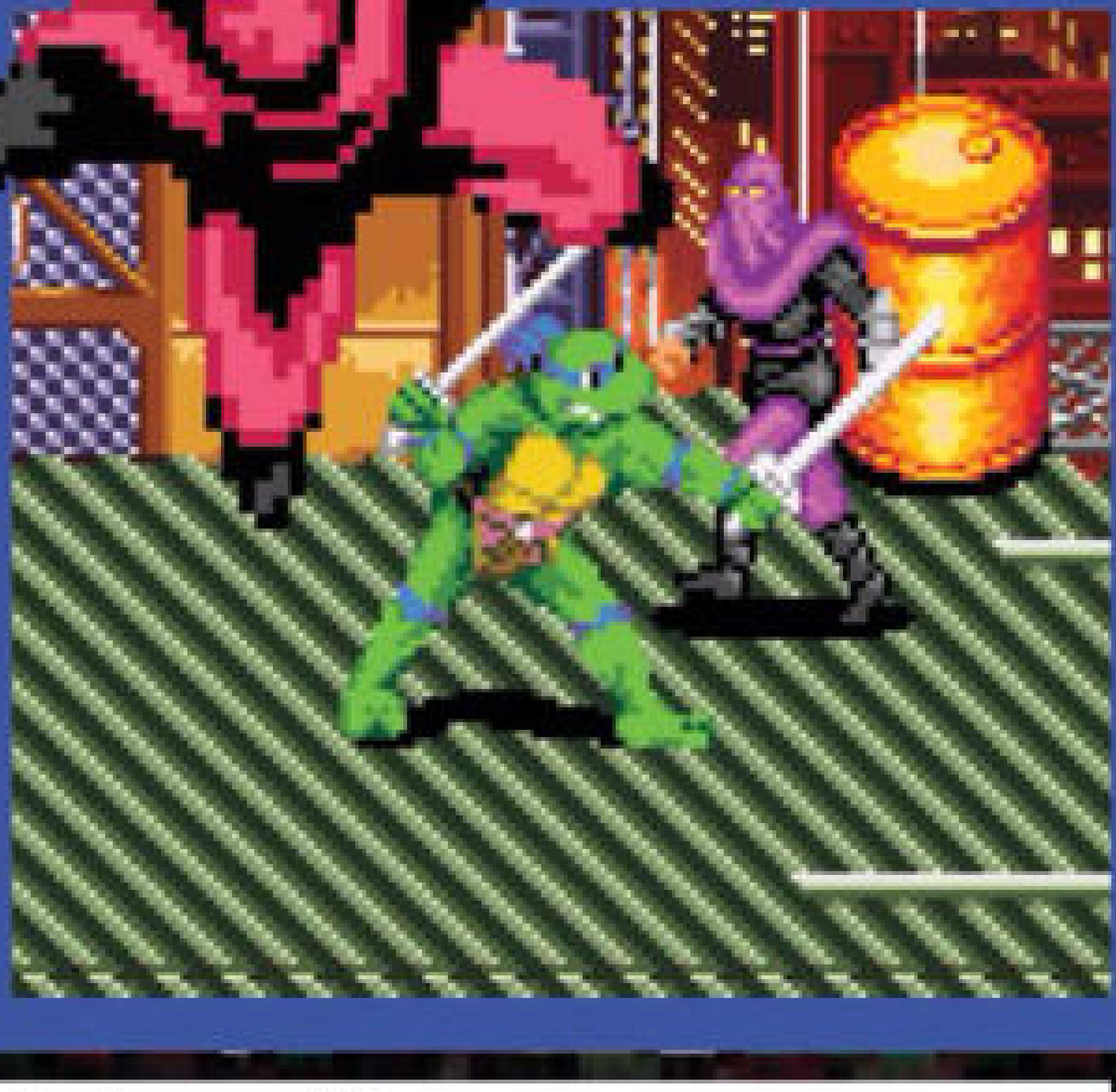
SD F-1 Grand Prix



The most blatant *Super Mario Kart* clone ever produced, *SD F-1 Grand Prix* stars a cast of cuddly super deformed (SD) critters and a few tracks which ape those in Nintendo's racer. As it sticks so close to the *Mario Kart* template it's unsurprising it's a decent racer. The irony though is that it's part of an established racing franchise (Video System's *F1 Grand Prix*) that predates *Super Mario Kart.* One of the more impressive Mode 7 racers.

Uchuu Race: Astro Go! Go!

The colourful eye-bursting result of what happens when you mix two parts *F-Zero* with one part *Super Mario Kart, Uchuu Race* is a bright, cutesy cartoonish future racer. The game's most notable thing is that you can turn your craft 360 degrees. As a result, the controls can feel erratic initially and make the more challenging pinball-style obstacle-packed stages quite frustrating. Overall though, it's a decent if imitative racer.



Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles IV: Turtles in Time

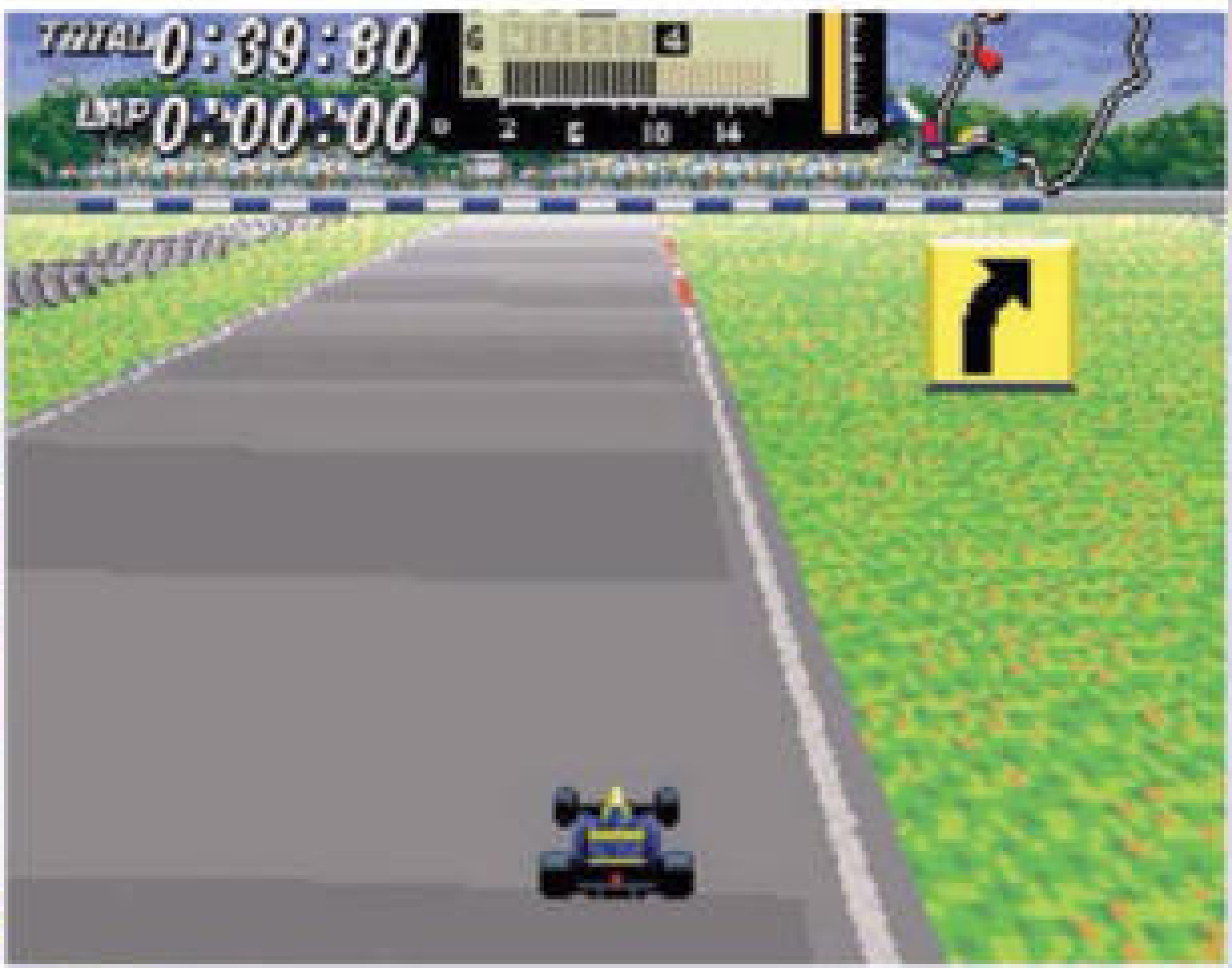
Best Mode 7 moment: Foot Soldier fling
Year: 1992
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-house

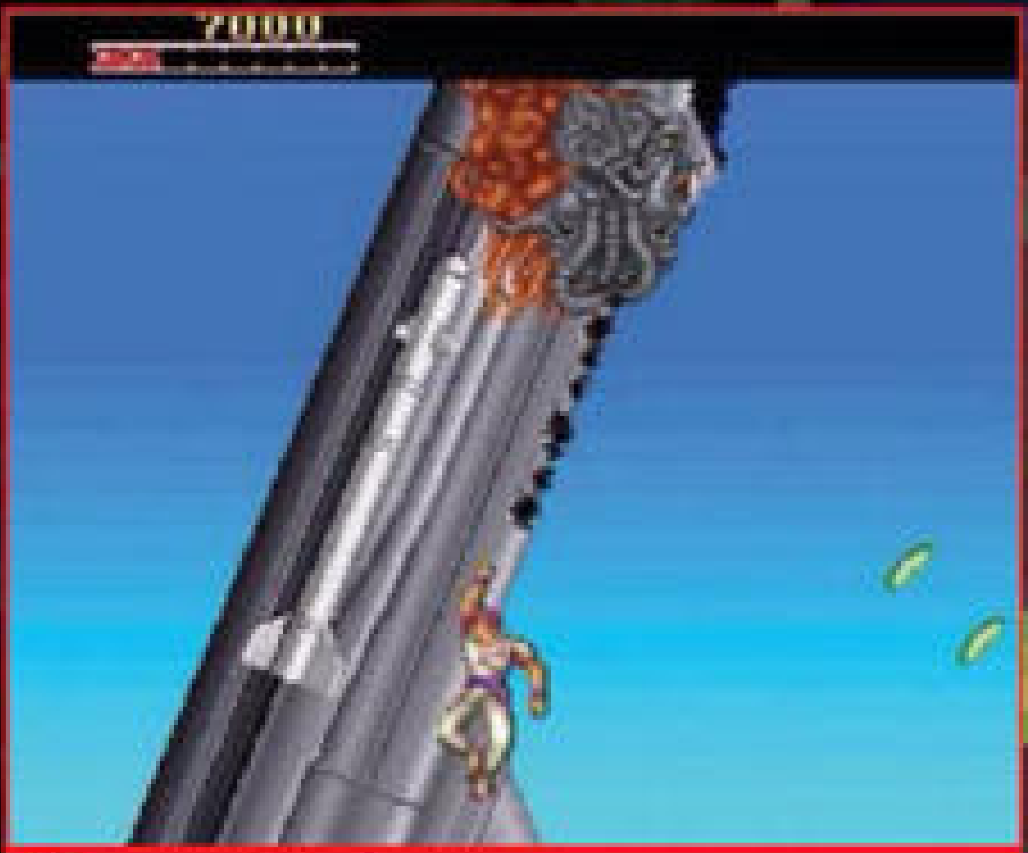
The most vivid Mode 7 scenes are often those that took us by surprise. Those moments we'd be sat playing game X and then all of a sudden a cool Mode 7 trick would materialize from out of nowhere. Though this SNES port features a great Mode 7 recreation of the arcade game's thrilling hoverboard stage, it's the Foot Soldier-towards-camera fling that stuck in our minds most. Capturing the slapstick nature of the cartoon perfectly, seeing it never gets boring. In fact, we'd even go so far as to say it's a frontrunner for the best Mode 7 moment ever.

Exhaust Heat

Best Mode 7 moment: Pitting
Year: 1992
Publisher: Seta Corporation
Developer: In-house

Exhaust Heat is a very different racer to Nintendo's more famous Mode 7 offerings. Its charm and speed are slow coming, with its tracks (based on real circuits) feeling a bit empty by comparison and exhilarating racing only arriving once you've enough money to upgrade your car. But be patient, and you'll find that *Exhaust Heat* is a great racer with some subtle sim elements. Wonderfully presented throughout, our standout Mode 7 moment occurs when you enter a pit and the camera seamlessly rotates to the side of your car.





Run Saber

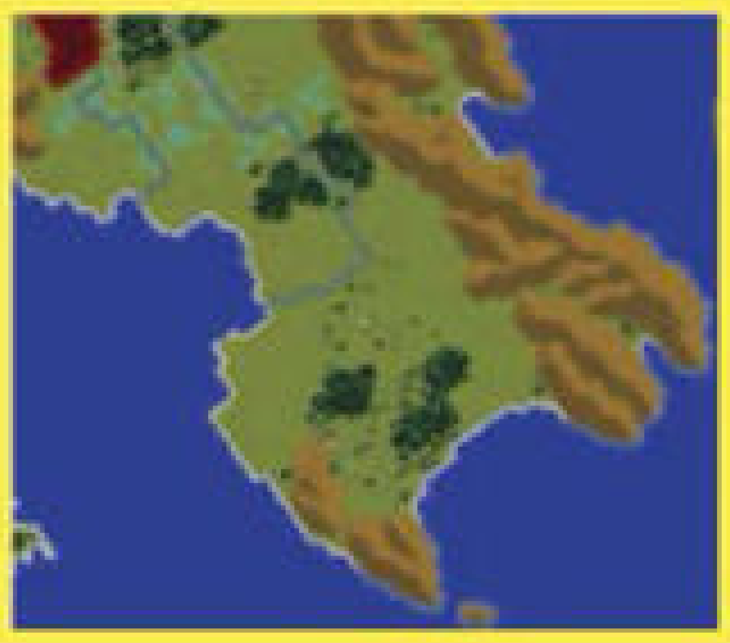
Best Mode 7 moment: Plane battle
Year: 1993
Publisher: Atlus Co.
Developer: Horisoft

Often dubbed as the *Super Nintendo Strider,* owing to starring two lithe plasma sword-waving heroes able to cling to walls and do fancy somersaults, *Run Saber* is an imitative but entertaining action game. Mode 7 was often used by developers as a way to insert something memorable to boss encounters, and this is demonstrated by *Run Saber*'s first boss. A battle that takes place in the sky, you have to fight a disembodied biomechanical Medusa head while clinging desperately to an F-14 Tomcat that loops in the air.

ActRaiser

Best Mode 7 moment: World map
Year: 1990
Publisher: Enix Corporation
Developer: Quintet

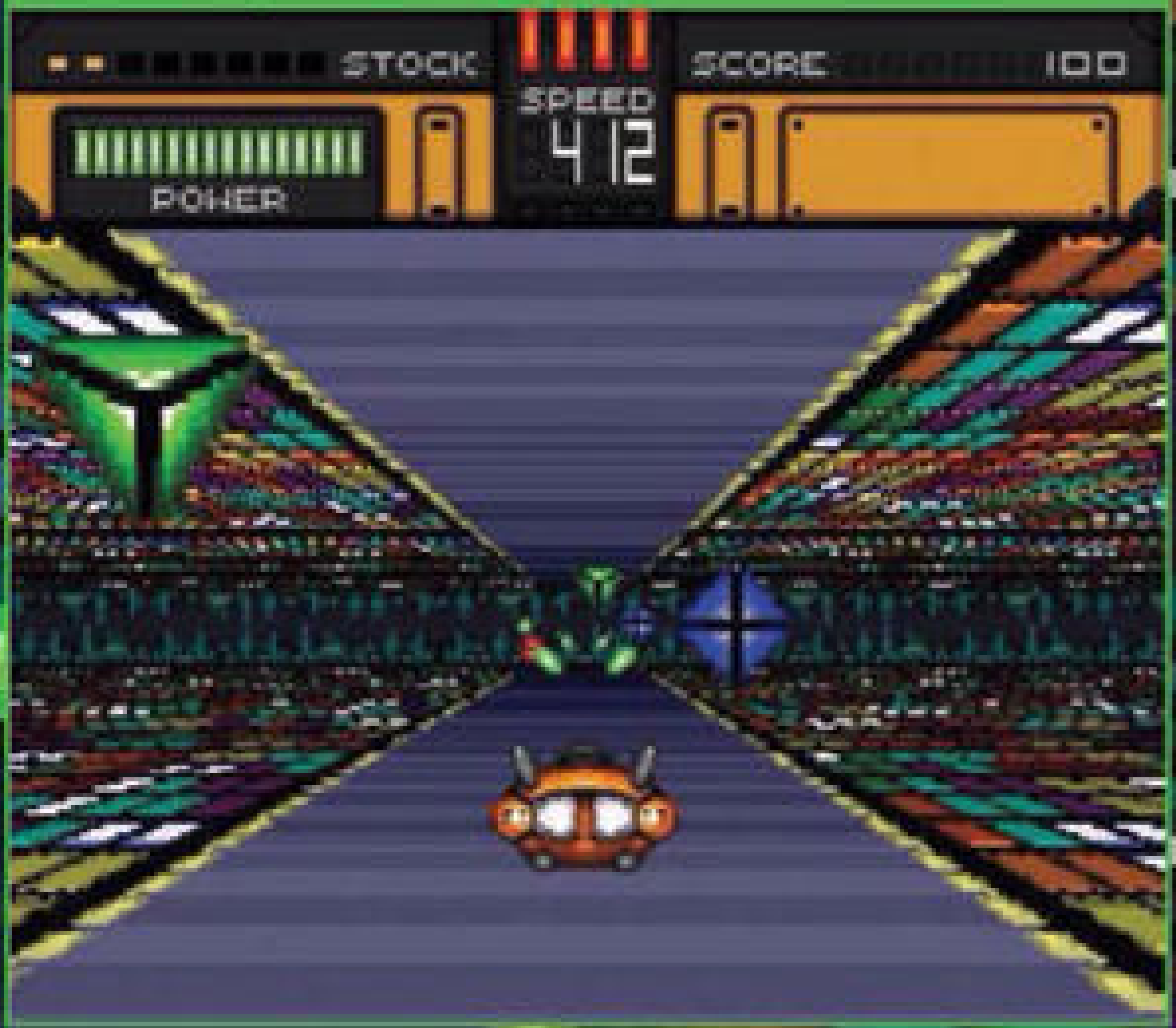
Anyone who has played this unusual city building hack-and-slash marriage will attest that its title screen really utilises Mode 7. Yes, it's just a spinning word, but it grabs your attention. For us though, the best Mode 7 moment has to be when you enter a new stage. Starting from high up in your heavenly hub palace, you see the camera spiral towards the overworld map and home in on the level.

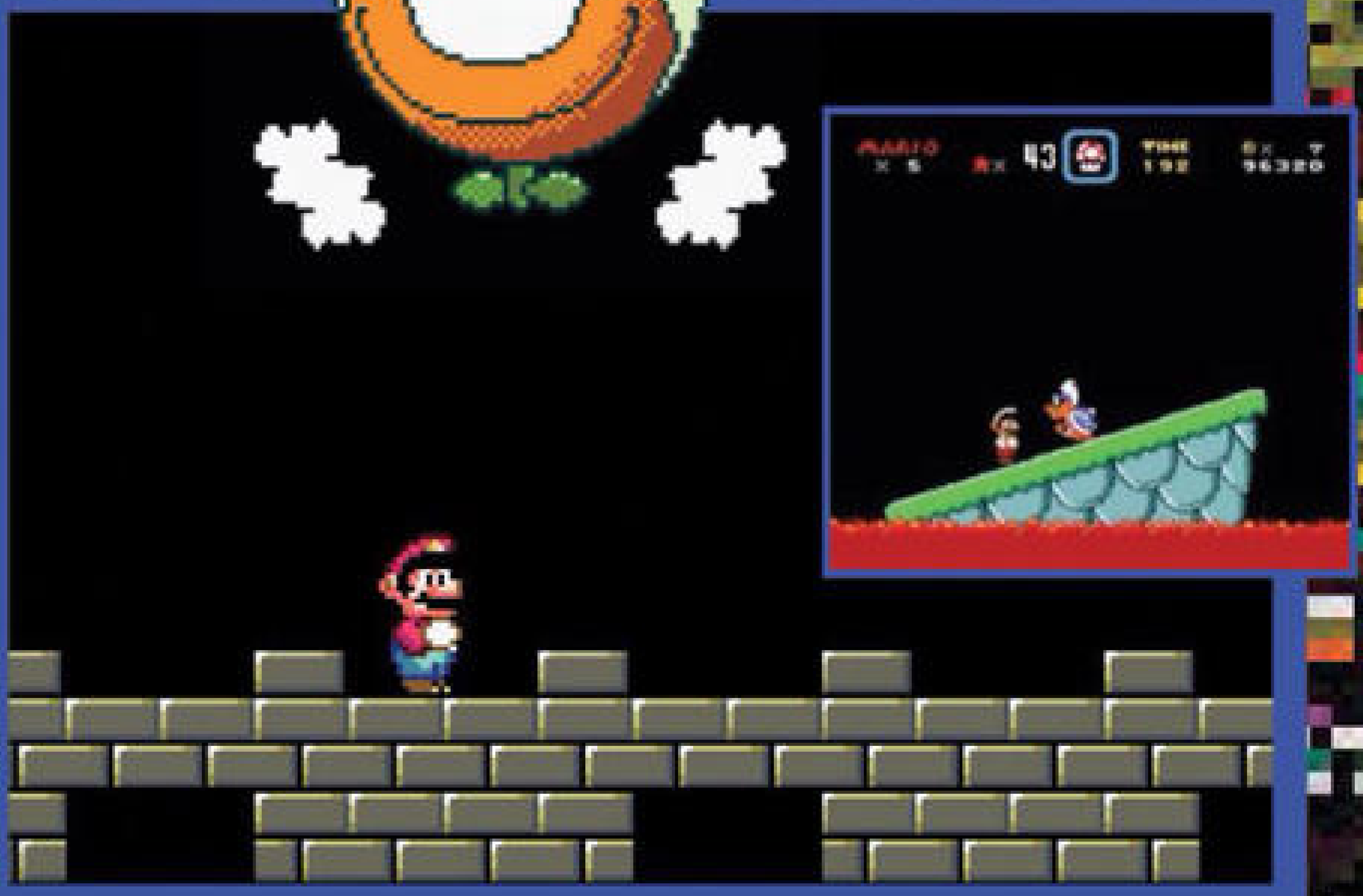


HyperZone

Best Mode 7 moment: First stage
Year: 1991
Publisher: HAL Laboratory
Developer: In-house

HyperZone was an early release for the console and arrived the very same month as the console's US release. Playing like a lovely sounding cross between *F-Zero* and *Space Harrier*, you steer a tubby spaceship through a series of eight colourful Mode 7-created courses, shooting unimaginative enemies until you come up against a slightly less unimaginative looking boss. The stages tracks also have strict lanes to follow, and straying from them causes your ship take damage *F-Zero*-style. While this does help to add a subtle racing feel to the shooting, there's not much fun or variety in *HyperZone*. It's a clear case of Mode 7 over substance – thankfully, and surprisingly, a road the majority of Mode 7 games chose not to follow.





Super Mario World

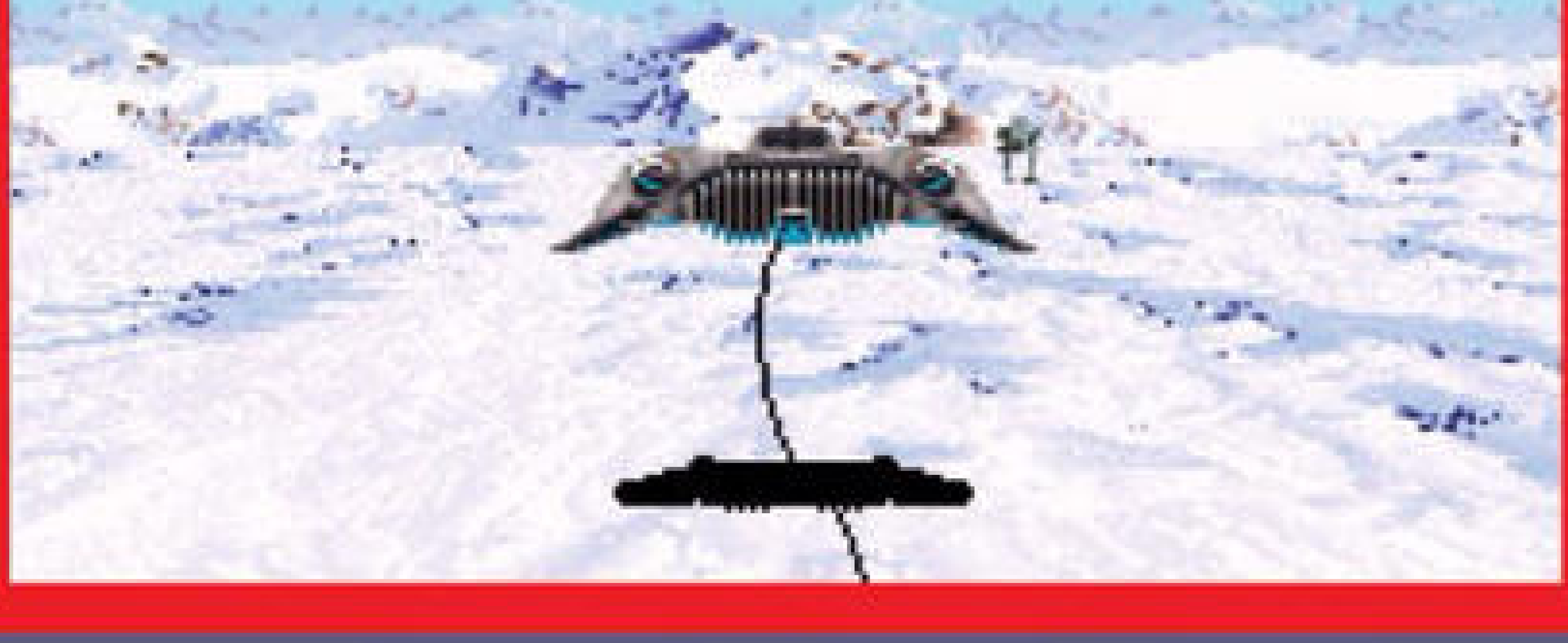
Best Mode 7 moment: Fighting Bowser
Year: 1990
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house

After revisiting *Mario*'s epic 16-bit adventure to write this feature we were surprised to discover that there weren't as many instances of Mode 7 being utilised as we remember. It's mostly used in the boss fights, where it can be seen creating the see-sawing platform you fight Iggy Koopa on and helping Morton Koopa JR. scale the inner walls of his castle. Nintendo saved the best example for last though, with a memorable final battle against Bowser that saw him dropping fireballs, enemies and giant cannonballs from inside a Dr. Robotnik-esque clown-faced flying machine. Breaking from his attack sequences to steer it backwards and then fly it towards the camera until that silly, smug clown face filled the entire screen, if that didn't motivate players into finishing the fight nothing would…Well maybe the added sight of seeing Princess Toadstool appear from inside the device to do her damsel-in-distress bit.

Super Star Wars – The Empire Strikes Back

Best Mode 7 moment: Battle of Hoth
Year: 1993
Publisher: LucasArts
Developer: Sculptured Software

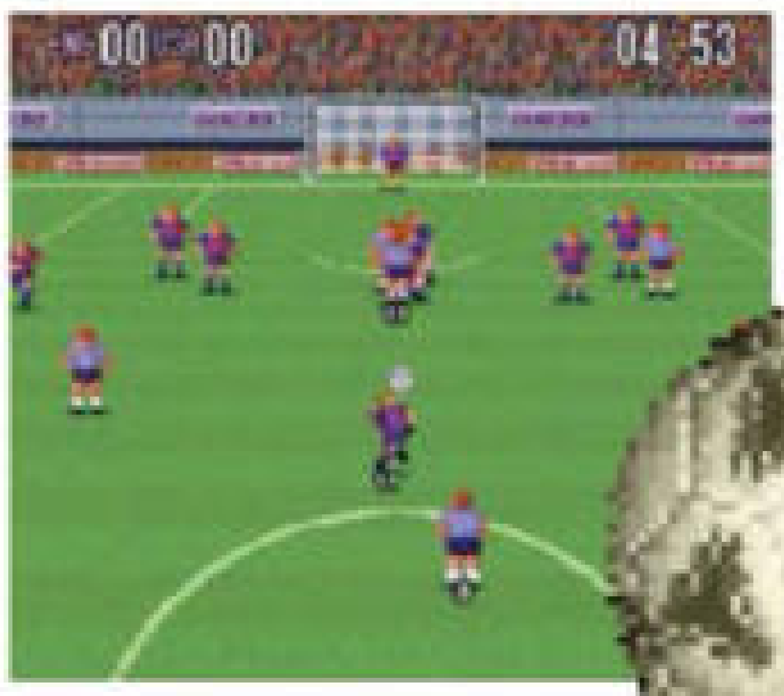
The Battle of Hoth has been restaged in videogames numerous times, and most have provided great set-piece moments – or in the case of the 2600 an entire game. This epic Mode 7 stage was the most faithful recreation of the epic snow fight. With some stunning undulating Hoth terra firma to fly over, the mission tasks you with destroying a set number of varied targets, ranging from Probe Droids to AT-ATs. The stage then gets really awesome when it introduces AT-AT Walkers to the fight and allows you to take them down by cable-tying their legs together and causing them to trip over and kiss the snow.

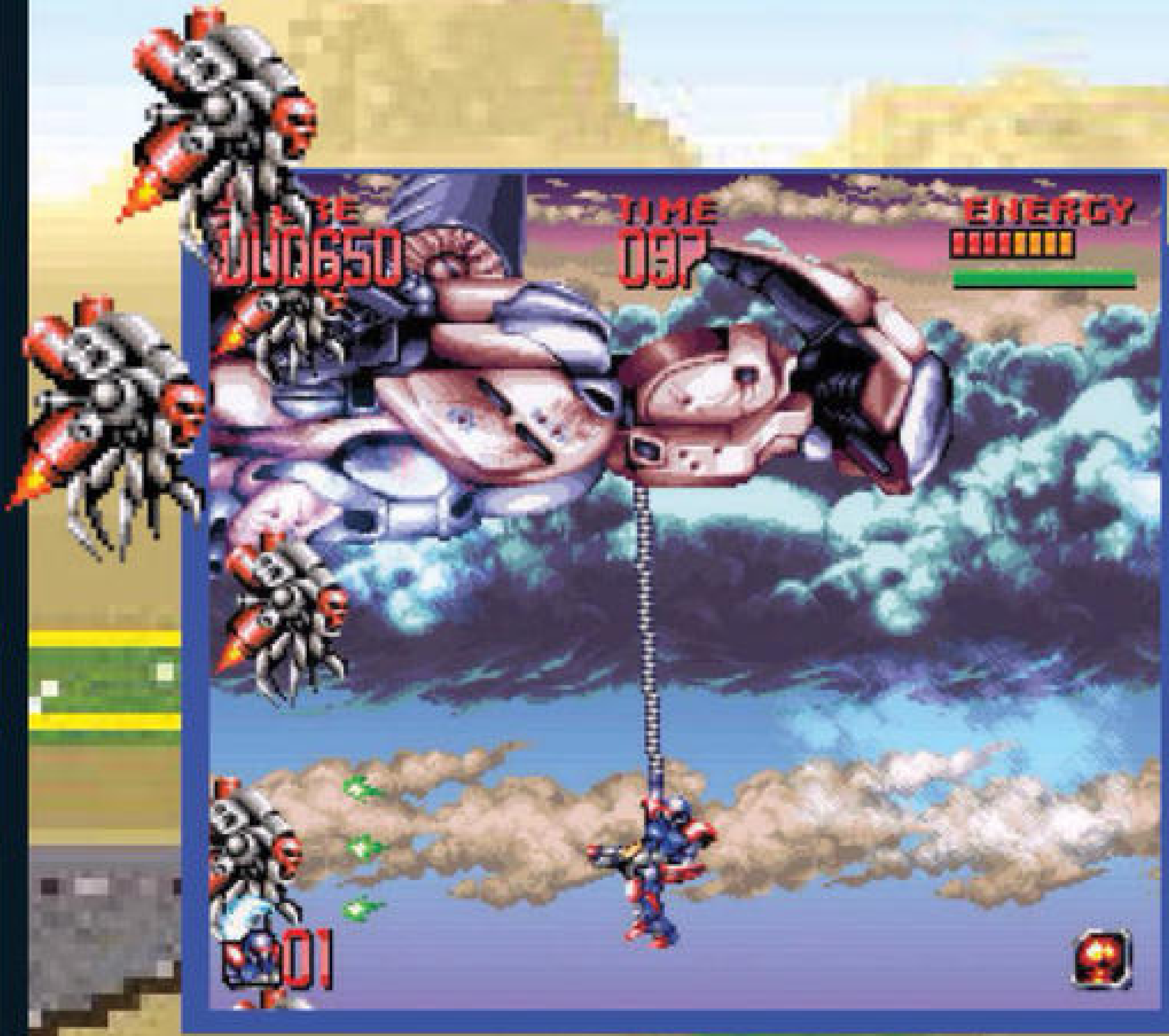


Super Soccer

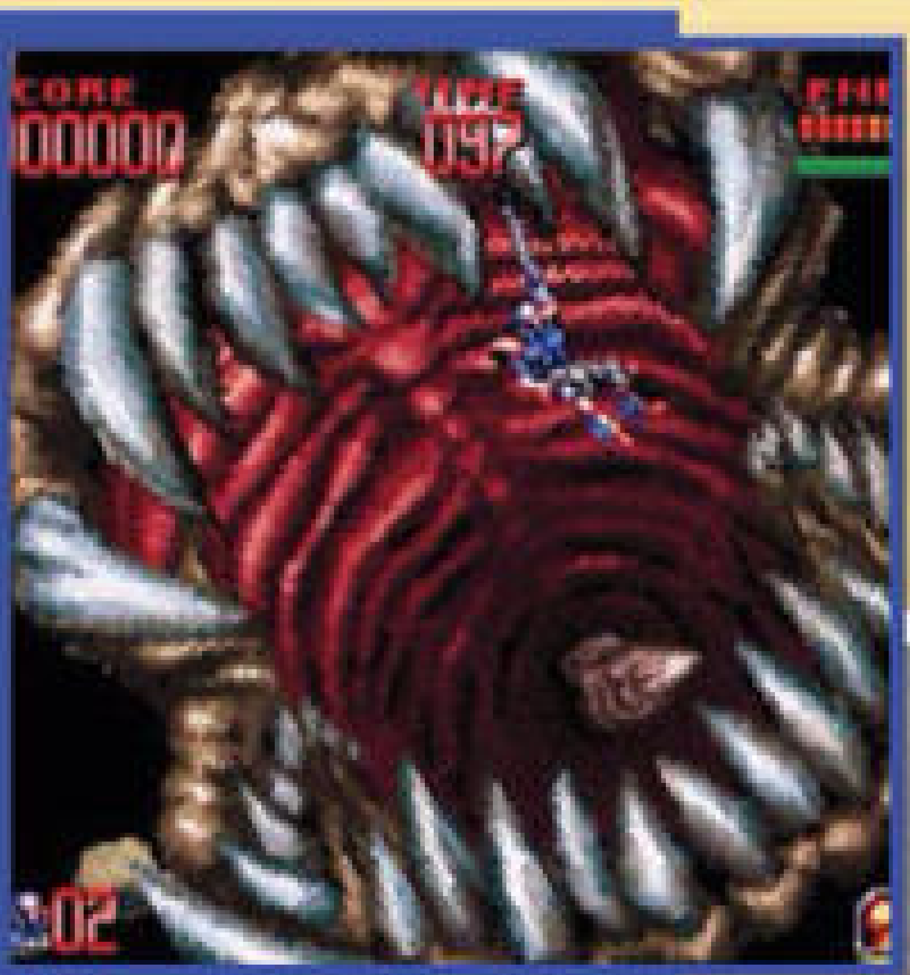
Best Mode 7 moment: Kick-off
Year: 1992
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Human Entertainment

While *Super Tennis* used Mode 7 in a subtle way – it was used on its intro screen and as a way to circle the camera around the court when players swapped ends, *Super Soccer* was much more blatant in its usage. The impressive looking but fidgety feeling football pitch certainly brought a few issues; the action felt a little sluggish, it wasn't always easy to judge passes and tackles, and for one half of the match you were running up a pitch you couldn't actually see. However, the jaunty graphics and unique perspective still won you over. *Super Soccer* isn't the greatest football game, but it certainly captures the fun nature of the sport, especially in multiplayer.





Super Turrican 2



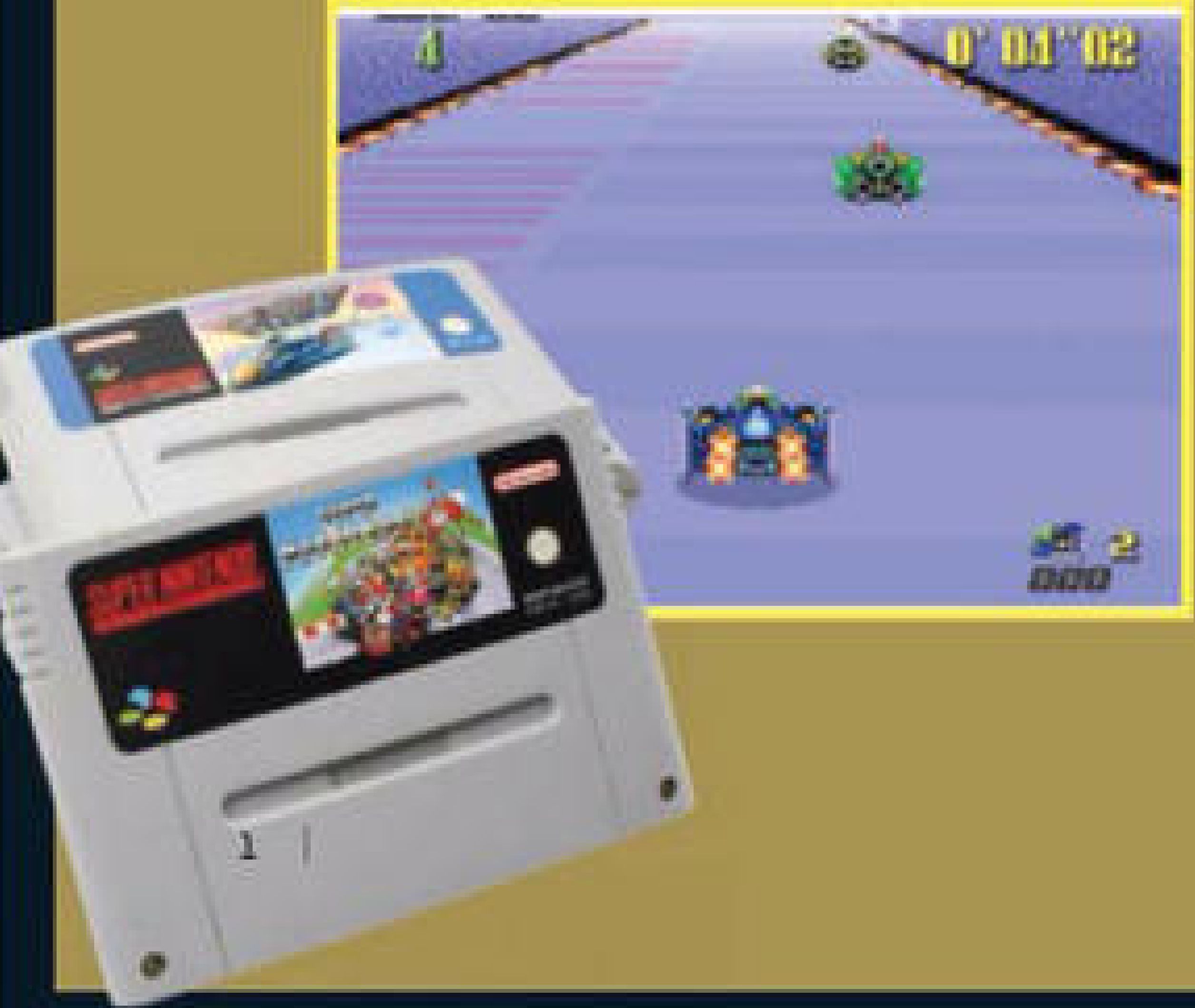
Best Mode 7 moment: Worm boss
Year: 1995
Publisher: Ocean
Developer: Factor 5

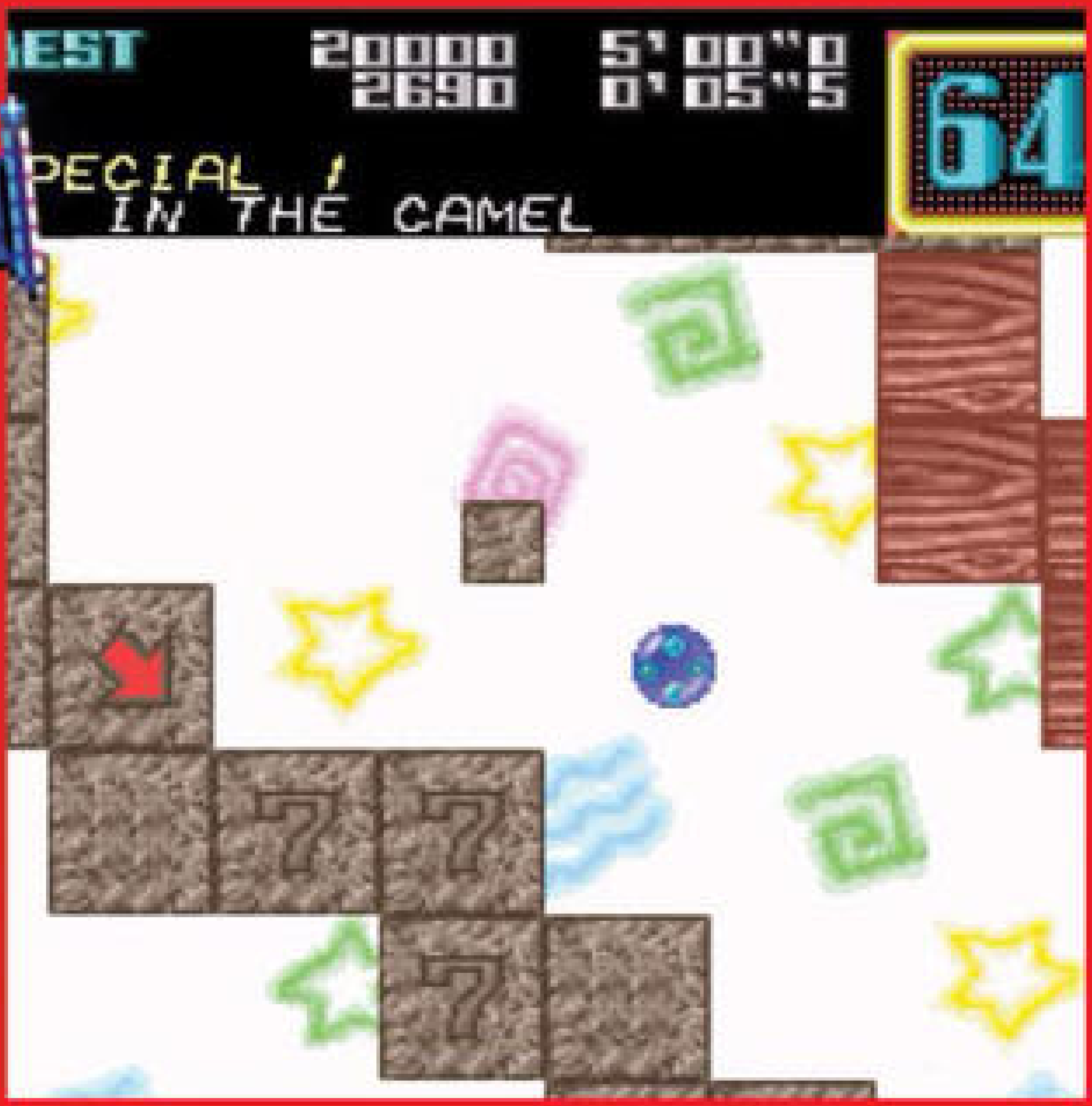
Super Turrican 2 really puts the Super Nintendo through its paces. Though it doesn't have the *Metroid* feel of the 8-bit original, it's a real showcase of fancy Super Nintendo visual effects, and provides no shortage of great Mode 7 moments. Our choice picks include the giant Mode 7 Sarlacc-style worm boss that you have to fight from inside its gaping mouth, the superb robotic spider boss, and the neat into-the-screen racing/shooter sections. Developed by Factor 5, who is probably most well-known for the *Star Wars Rogue Squadron* series of Nintendo games, it's a truly fantastic shooter with visuals, imagination and set-piece moments that easily meet those high points of *Contra 3*, and Chris Hueslbeck's soundtrack is brilliant too. A polished and sensational shooter, it's just a shame that copies go for so much money these days.

F-Zero

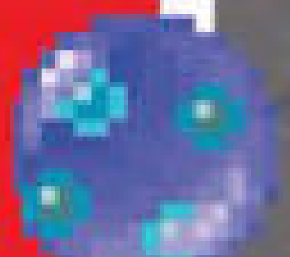
Best Mode 7 moment: First track
Year: 1990
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house

While *F-Zero* may not be the most deep racing experience, if seen as Nintendo trying to show that its new console could easily handle an arcade-style racing game then it certainly achieves its goal. Said to be loosely connected to the obscure NES racer *Mach Rider*, which started its life as a plastic toy bike back when Nintendo was a toy maker, *F-Zero* was a perfect showcase for what the Mode 7 could do. Not only was *F-Zero* a launch game for the console but it was also the first game to utilise Mode 7, which here is used to create its stunning pseudo 3D tracks. Allowing the racing to feel incredibly fast and smooth as it wasn't pushing around intricate track and level designs – something which has remained a speed over detail hallmark for the series, nothing touched it in terms of exhilaration and visuals. It even left some arcade games eating its dust.





On The Ball



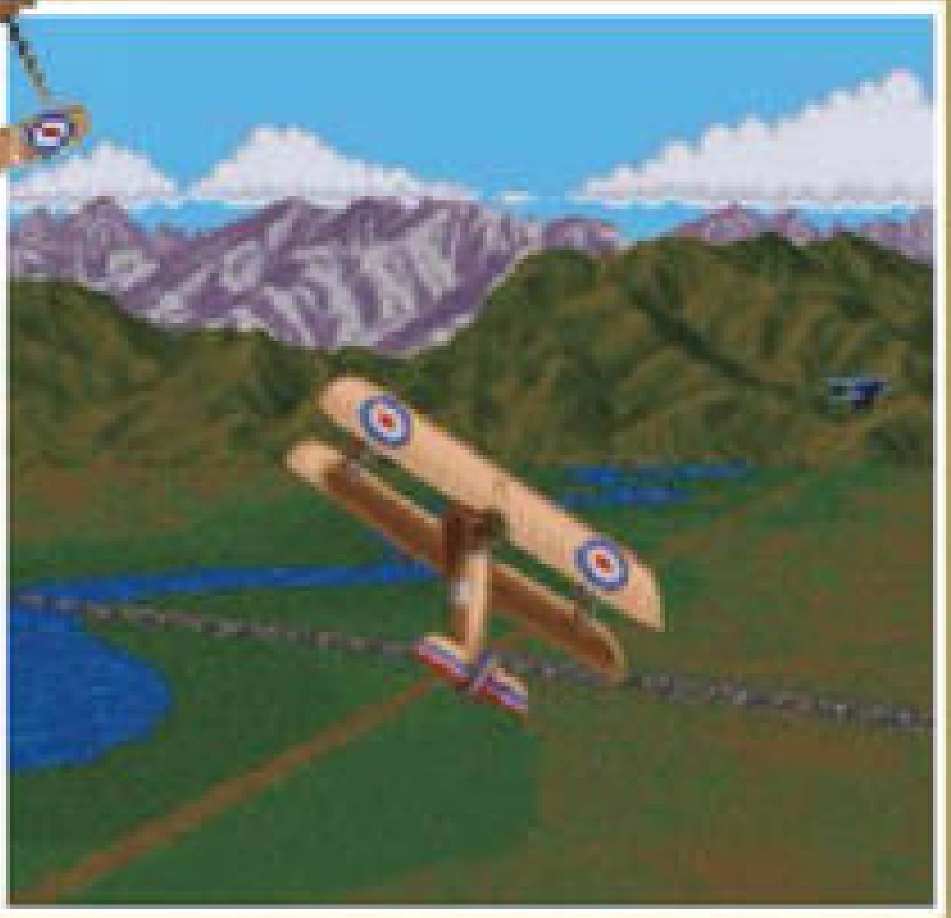
Best Mode 7 moment: Goal!!!
Year: 1992
Publisher: Taito Corporation
Developer: In-house

On The Ball is an on point SNES conversion of Taito's superb 1989 arcade puzzle game *Cameltry*. If you're unfamiliar with it, your objective is to steer a ball through a labyrinth and reach a goal before time expires. As the game progresses, the mazes become more devilish as more obstacles get thrown into the mix, including blocks that knock seconds off your time if you touch them, and traffic light gates that, well, we're sure you all know how traffic lights work. With your players rotating the maze rather than the ball to move it around, *On The Ball* was pretty much built for Mode 7. Thus it's a superb and faithful conversion, and though it could have benefitted from being a little bit longer, is still a must for puzzle fans.

Wings 2: Aces High

Best Mode 7 moment: The map
Year: 1992
Publisher: Namco
Developer: Malibu

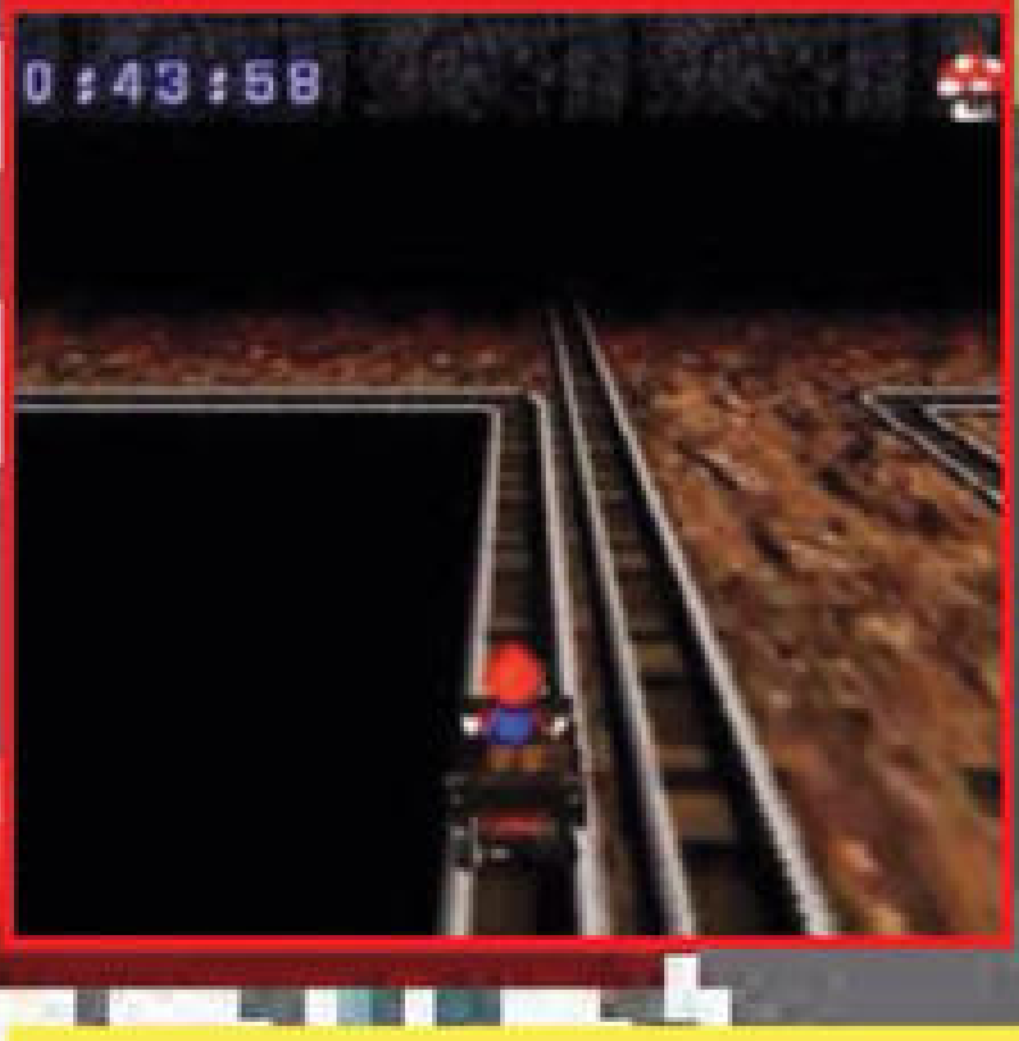
Namco's *Wings 2: Aces High* was WWI placed and made great use of Mode 7. Piloting a WWI biplane, you have to complete a series of bombing and dog fight missions that build up to an aerial battle with the German Top Gun, Red Baron. Mode 7 is used here in two different ways: to create realistic 3D scrolling ground effects as you're flying through the air, and on the bombing missions to zoom the camera towards the floor as your plane flies towards it. The latter is particularly successful as the ground looks crisper the closer you are to it.

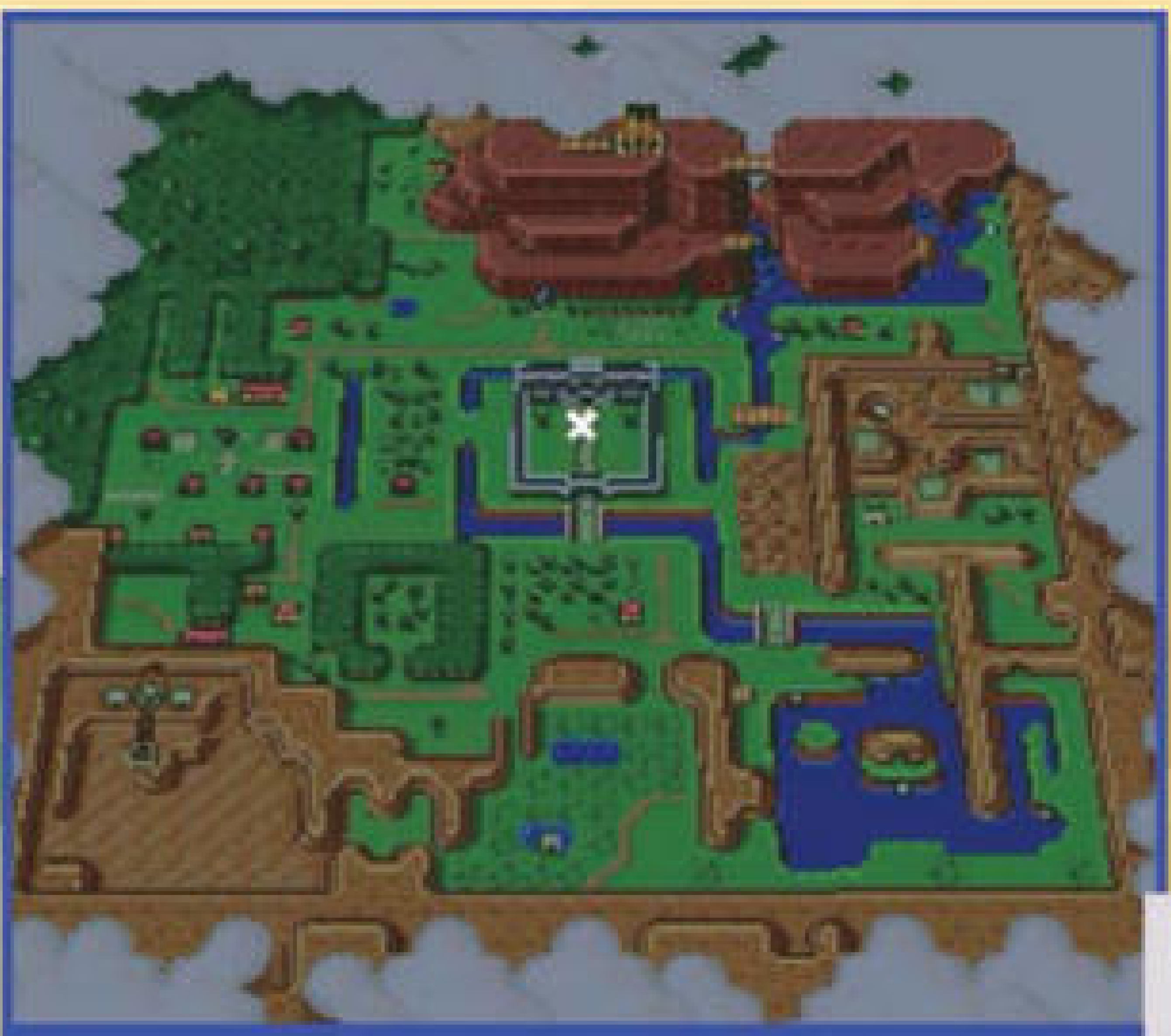


Super Mario RPG: Legend Of The Seven Stars

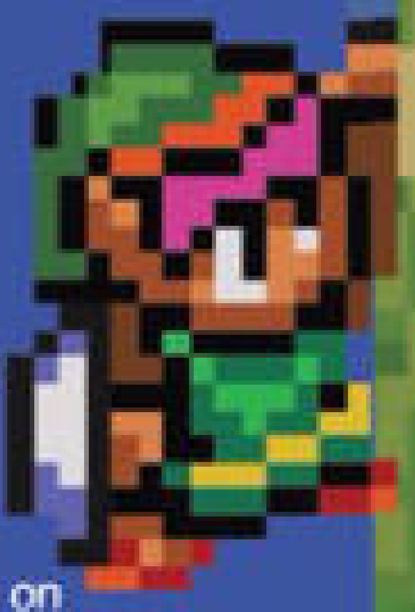
Best Mode 7 moment: Mine car challenge
Year: 1996
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house

Super Mario RPG is packed with mini-games, but this one is our favourite. Found at the end of the Molehill area, the Mode 7 mine car section serves as both a neat distraction and way to take you to the next section of the adventure. As the car moves on rails (obviously), players have to collect mushrooms and coins and jump any breaks in the track. There are also two Mode 7 side-scrolling sections that add a bit of extra variety to the action too.





The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past



Best Mode 7 moment: Map of Hyrule
Year: 1991
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house

Hyrule is such a big part of any *Zelda* adventure, so it seems fitting that Nintendo would want to do something special with the map screen. The Mode 7 map plays a prominent part in its gameplay and story, with players not only relying on it to get around the huge world but also allowing them to see the full effects and differences between its light and dark incarnations. It is without doubt one of the most iconic and fondly remembered game maps in history.

Mode 7 Mirrors

Mega Drive

The Mega Drive is unable to do Mode 7 but there are games that show the console doing impress graphics tricks. For a similar rotational effect look at the top-down shooter *Red Zone* in action, or for some exhilarating into-the-screen shooting see *Burning Force*.

Atari Lynx

The Atari Lynx was capable of generating Mode 7-style scaling and rotation effects two years before the Super Nintendo. And the Lynx could actually even go a step better by being able to rotate and scale individual sprites, an effect noticeable in games like *Pit Fighter* and *California Games*.

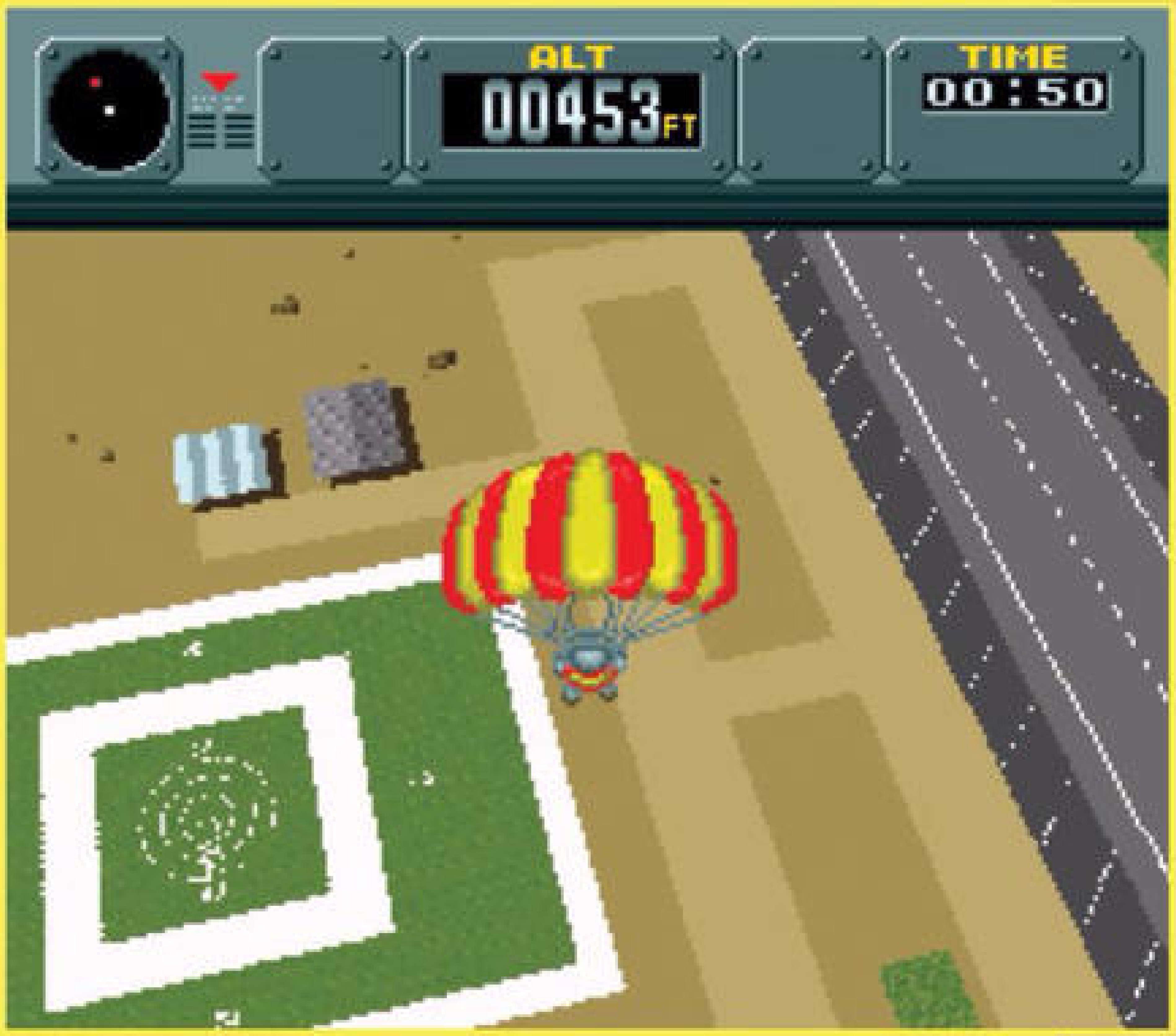
Sega Mega CD

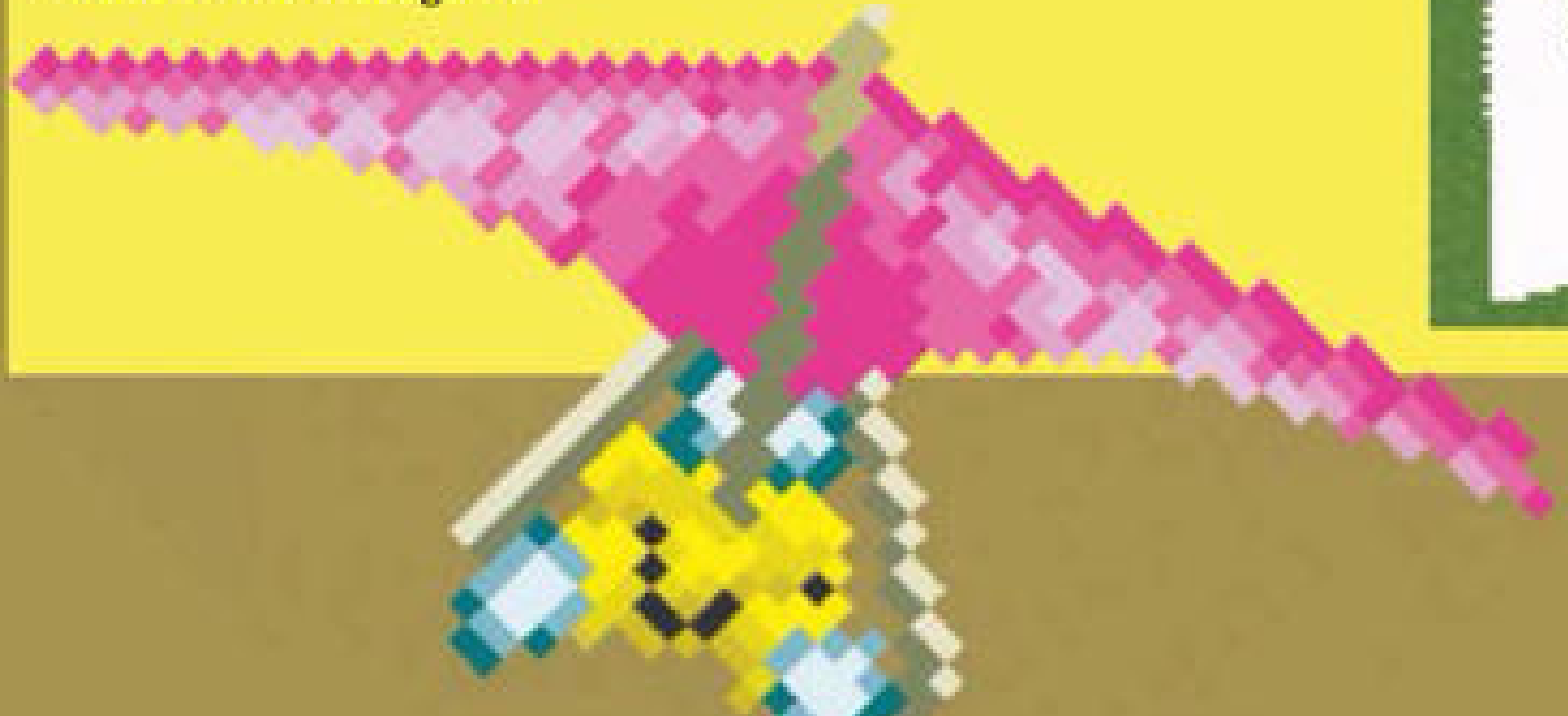
Sega's ill fated CD-Rom add-on for the Mega Drive was capable of Mode 7 effects. Perhaps the most famous example is the 3D bonus stages of *Sonic CD*, which saw Sonic running in a 3D rotating world trying to get those pesky Chaos Emeralds.

Pilotwings

Best Mode 7 moment: Free falling
Year: 1990
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house

Whichever way you cut it, *Pilotwings* just wouldn't have been possible without Mode 7, and that's because here it isn't used to create a fancy background effect, boss or map, but – in a rare instance – an open-feeling world. By Nintendo choosing to base its game in a Flight School rather than the usual po-faced military scenario, it showed that flight sims could be universally fun and accessible. An early release for the Super Nintendo (it was a launch title for the console in the US and Europe), *Pilotwings* was unique. There was nothing really like it on the console market at the time, and it showed perhaps better than any other SNES game the immersive and engaging properties that Mode 7 brought to the table. If you removed Mode 7 from *Pilotwings* then the screen would be as empty and as black as space… or a better metaphor: nothingness. In *Pilotwings*, Mode 7 hardly ever sleeps. It's always in the background working away and showing off the impressive rotation and scaling effects it could generate. For all intents and purposes, *Pilotwings* is *Mode 7: The Videogame*.





IMPORT ONLY

GAME ORIGIN

- » **COUNTRY:** JAPAN
- » **POPULATION:** 127,433,494
- » **CAPITAL:** TOKYO
- » **NATIONAL LANGUAGE:** JAPANESE
- » **CURRENCY:** YEN
- » **TIME ZONE:** GMT +9

» **CO-ORDINATES:** 35°41' N 139°46' E

INFO

RENDERING RANGER
START
OPTIONS
PASSWORD

- » **PUBLISHER:** VIRGIN INTERACTIVE
- » **DEVELOPER:** RAINBOW ARTS
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** SUPER NINTENDO
- » **ALSO ON:** N/A
- » **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
- » **RELEASED:** 1995
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £200+ ($350+)

EVOLUTION OF THE GENRE

▲ Retro

CONTRA
RELEASED:
1987

Konami's classic run-and-gun series began with this brilliantly brash coin-op shooter. Yes it riffed heavily off alien and wasn't the most original of games, but by goodness it was a lot of fun. While it hit its peak with *Contra III: The Alien Wars*, the original remains a fun blast.

▼ Modern

HARD CORPS: UPRISING
RELEASED:
2011

This crazy, over-the-top shooter marries the awesome sprite design of Arc System Works to the hard-core stylings of Konami's *Contra* series. The end result is a highly challenging run-and-gun that's as fiendishly hard as it is beautiful to look at. It ties in with the *Contra* series too, being a prequel to the Mega Drive's *Contra: Hard Corps*.

RENDERING RANGER: R2

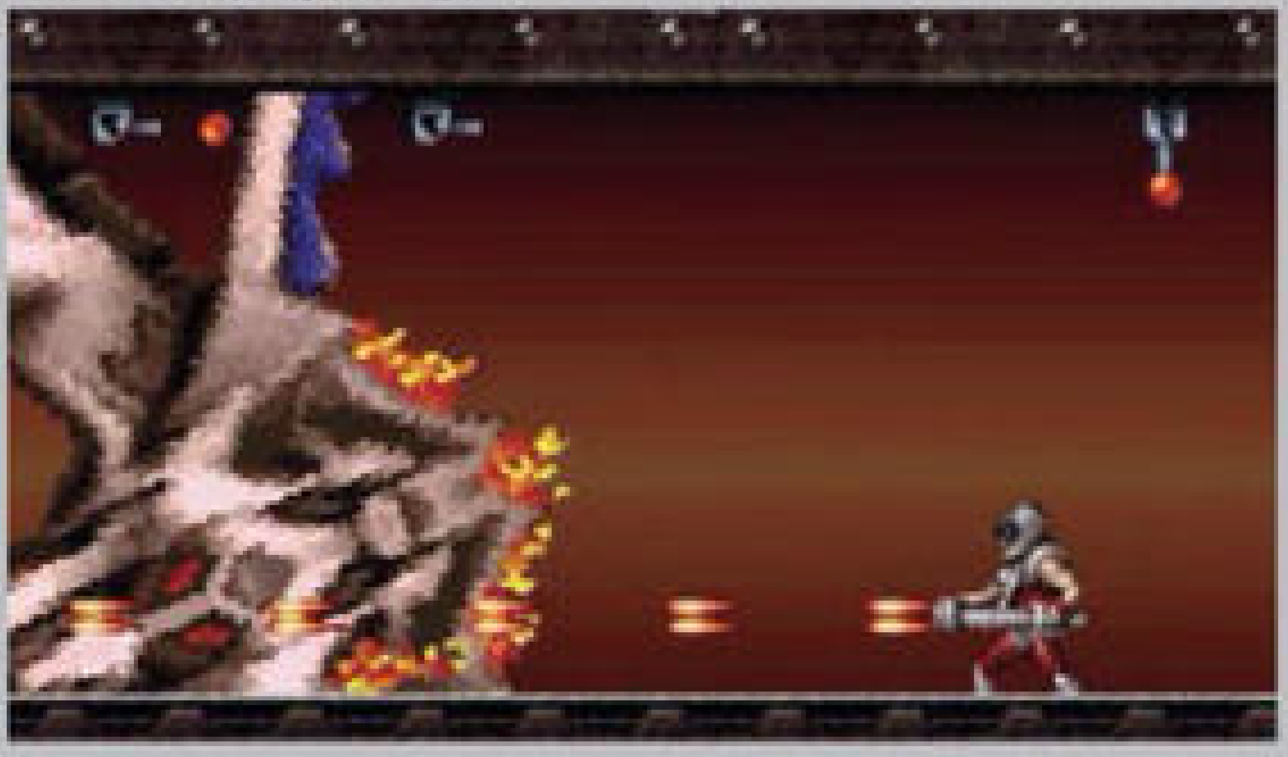
» Released in very small numbers in Japan, this title, which blends elements of Thunder Force, R-Type and Contra, is regarded as the Holy Grail of Super Nintendo gaming – but is it worthy of its lofty asking price? Stuart Hunt pawns his grandmother's wedding ring to find out

Most import titles will set you back a pretty penny, but it's the rare titles that will almost always command the tall asking prices. Usually when a game is rare, it's because it was produced in the same numbers as Fabergé Eggs, and this is because either it wasn't actually all that good, or was actually quite brilliant but its publisher saw it a risk and did a lacklustre job in seeing its full domestic appeal so only a few copies exist in the world. *Rendering Ranger: R2* (which we'll just dub *R2* from this point on) is an example of the former – it's a glorious-looking SNES shooter that was only snapped up by Virgin Interactive's Japanese arm and, as a result, tragically only saw limited release in Japan, with as few as several thousand copies manufactured according to some sources – which is why complete copies of the game can command asking prices as high as £200 ($350).

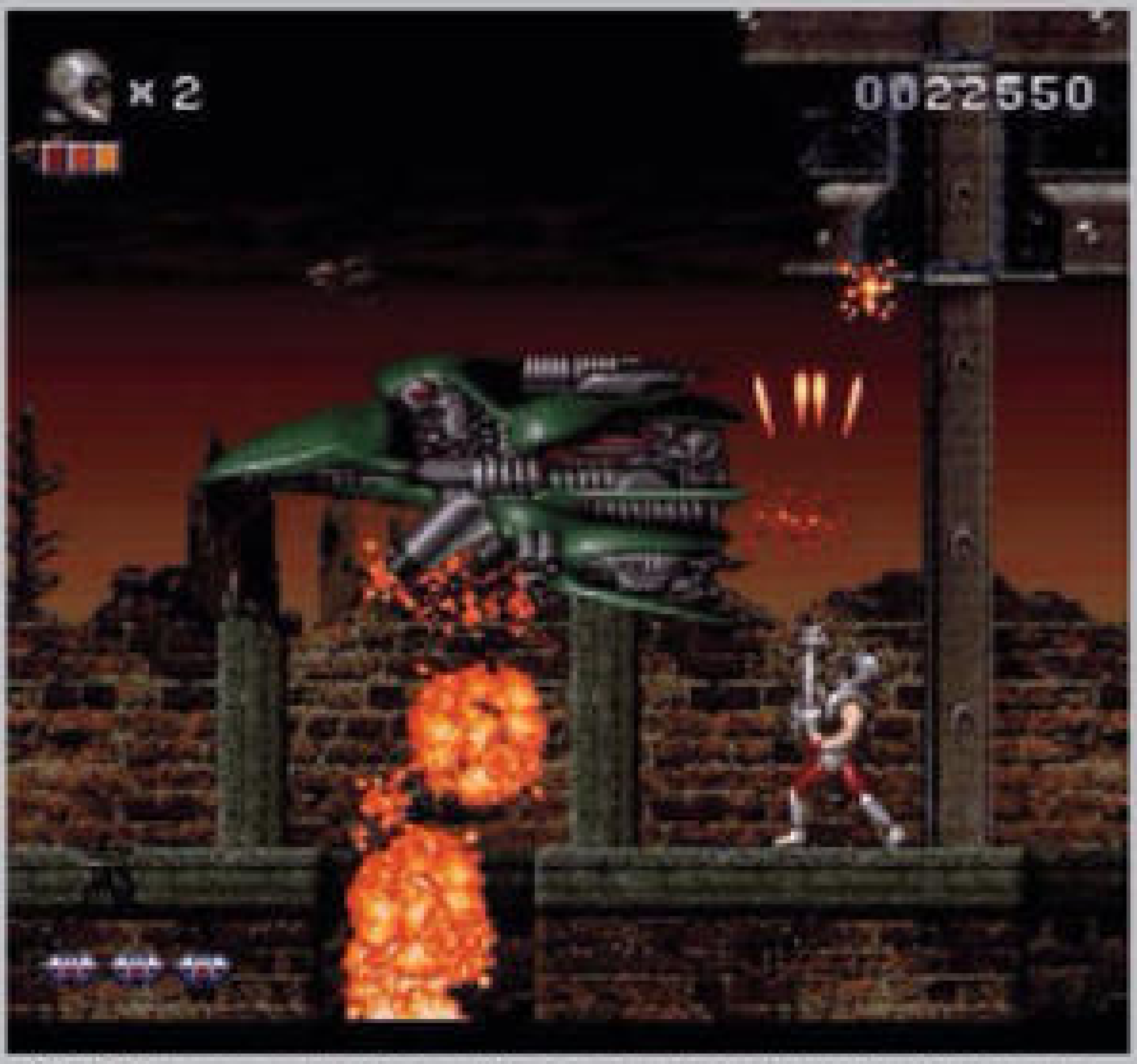
Designed by Manfred Trenz, *R2* is one of the Super Nintendo's most obscure titles, but is also one of the machine's little-known import gems, showcasing some of the best 2D visuals you'll see from a Super Nintendo.

As such, anyone who argues that the Super Nintendo is not capable of doing frenetic shooters, and feels that they need more evidence than our *Axelay* feature in issue 80, should take the time to discover the game. Set against the backdrop of a bleak futuristic world under attack from a phalanx of mechanised menaces, *R2* is notable for mixing side-scrolling run-and-gun game sections with multiple scrolling space shooter bits, which both work to make it an epic, unique and varied shooter.

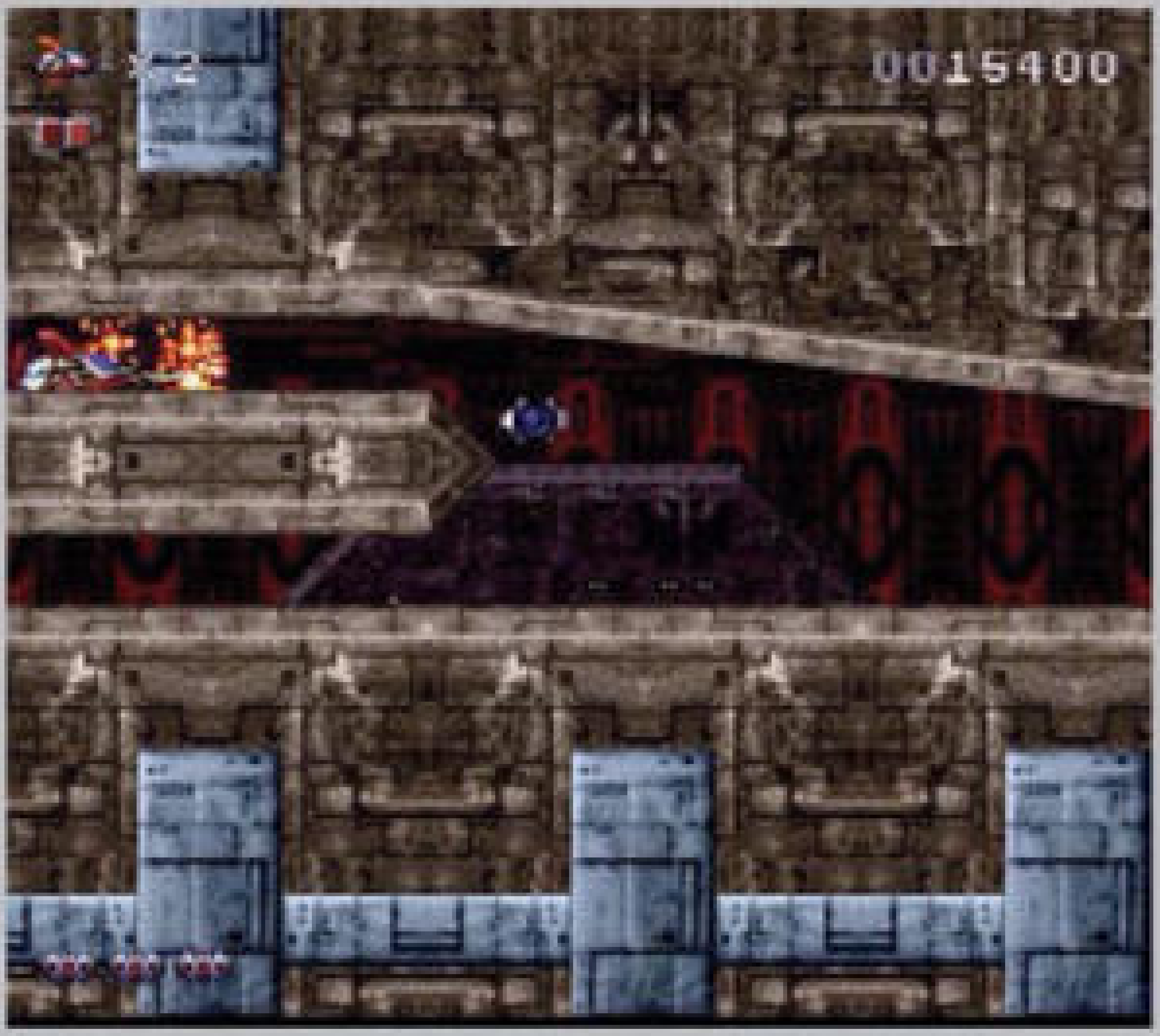
[SNES] The game's opening stage includes an impressive use of Mode 7 scrolling, as this ship smashes through the stage.



The first section – the run-and-gun component – plays and looks very similar to Konami's Super Nintendo classic, *Contra III*. Assuming the role of a lone soldier who resembles one of the helmeted cops from NARC, you battle through a war-ravaged alien/robot world that



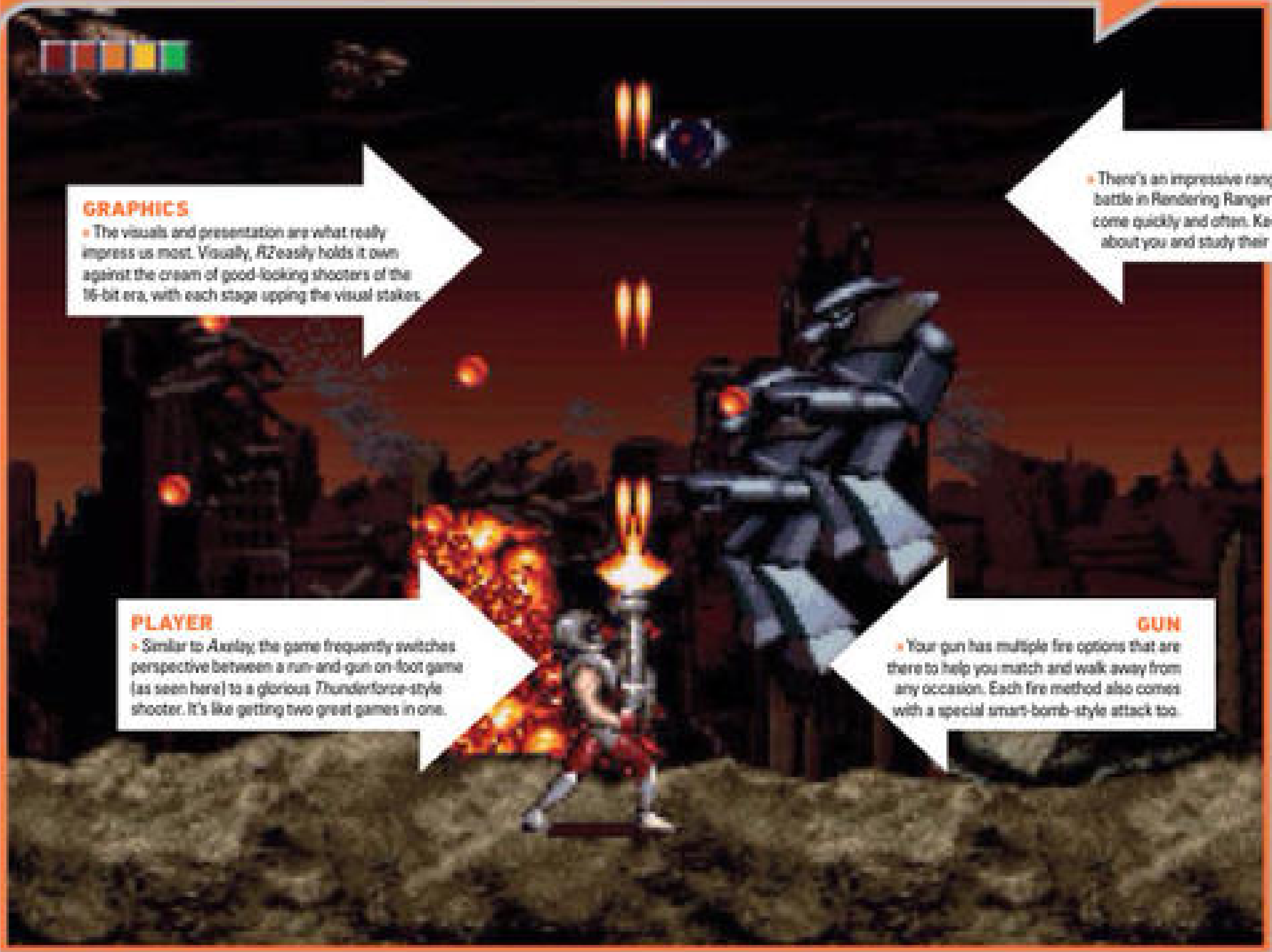
» [SNES] The game was only picked up by Virgin in Japan, hence its scarcity and asking price.



» [SNES] With its visuals, we think the game has a whiff of Amiga shooter about it.

GO DEEPER

What to look out for when playing Rendering Ranger: R2



GRAPHICS
» The visuals and presentation are what really impress us most. Visually, *R2* easily holds it own against the cream of good-looking shooters of the 16-bit era, with each stage upping the visual stakes.

ENEMIES
» There's an impressive range of enemies to battle in Rendering Ranger: R2 and attacks come quickly and often. Keeps your nerves about you and study their attack patterns.

PLAYER
» Similar to *Axelay*, the game frequently switches perspective between a run-and-gun on-foot game (as seen here) to a glorious *Thunderforce*-style shooter. It's like getting two great games in one.

GUN
» Your gun has multiple fire options that are there to help you match and walk away from any occasion. Each fire method also comes with a special smart-bomb-style attack too.

> **"R2 is widely known for being one of the Super Nintendo's most obscure titles, and one of the machine's little-known import gems"**

is teeming with all manner of biomechanical menaces. The graphics and sounds throughout *R2* are superb, with Trenz concocting a seemingly endless roster of enemies to fight and detailed scenery to ensure there is plenty of stuff to catch your eye, even in the backgrounds.

Along with the great visuals, memorable bosses and heavy rock soundtrack, *R2* also featured some awesome firepower. You can collect up to four different upgradable fire types over the course of the game, each with their own unique special attack that self-replenishes, and these can be switched on the fly to suit your situation.

Each of the nine stages in the game is wonderfully designed as well. The third stage, which is the first of the game's spaceship sections, riffs on *Thunderforce III*'s memorable lava stage, while Stage 6 pays fantastic homage to *R-Type*'s Bydo frigate boss/stage – but with players forced to weave in and out of the ship's insides to survive its attack.

If there is one criticism to level at the game, though, it's the difficulty. The game is extremely challenging, with wave after wave of enemies to vanquish, lengthy boss fights to survive and no continues to fall back on. This hefty challenge culminates in the game's hair-tearing penultimate stage; a claustrophobic descent into a warren of underground tunnels, which requires superhuman reaction times and a dose of luck to get through alive.

When you consider how well the game marries together the two shooter sub-genres, it comes as a surprise to learn that *R2* was originally rumoured to be a straight space shooter. However, due to the popularity of the run-and-gun genre coupled with the huge success that Trenz had seen with *Turrican*, it was decided mid-development that the on-foot sections be added, and that the art style also be changed to hand-drawn pre-rendered sprites, as they were proving popular thanks to the likes of twilight 16-bit titles such as *Killer Instinct* and *Donkey Kong Country*.

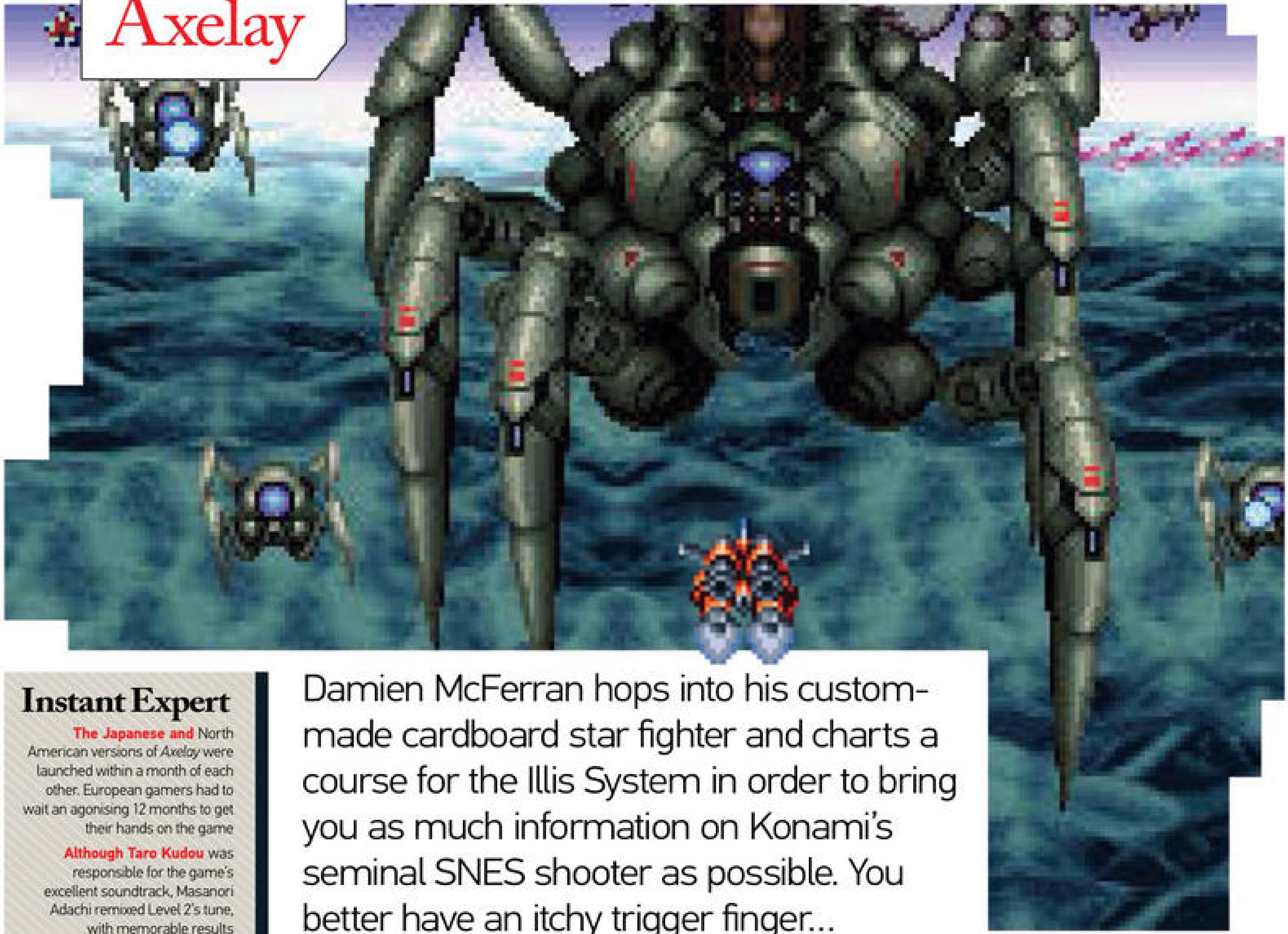
While these changes were to blame for the game's lengthy development, which caused its release to fall inside that chancy 1995 interim period between two console generations, Trenz's skill as a designer certainly shines through, masterfully binding together the two parts to create one of the most insane, challenging and sought-after shmups on Super Nintendo.

CAN'T IMPORT? YOU COULD TRY

TURRICAN
» *Turrican* caused a stir on its release, owing to its awe-inspiring visuals, free-roaming gameplay and excellent soundtrack. The game achieved things on humble microcomputers that many didn't think possible. If you want to experience Trenz at his best, then it has to be *Turrican*.

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO…

Axelay



Damien McFerran hops into his custom-made cardboard star fighter and charts a course for the Illis System in order to bring you as much information on Konami's seminal SNES shooter as possible. You better have an itchy trigger finger…

Instant Expert

The Japanese and North American versions of *Axelay* were launched within a month of each other. European gamers had to wait an agonising 12 months to get their hands on the game

Although Taro Kudou was responsible for the game's excellent soundtrack, Masanori Adachi remixed Level 2's tune, with memorable results

***Axelay*'s soundtrack was** released on CD in Japan on 21 October 1992

The Axelay fighter was featured in the 2004 PS2 release *Airforce Delta Strike*, which was retitled *Deadly Skies III* in Europe

***Axelay* features references** to other Konami titles, the most obvious being the flame dragons on Level 5 – a cheeky nod to similar enemies in *Gradius II*

A beta version of the game was made available, which allowed players to quickly select which level they wished to tackle as well as gain invincibility. This version was used to bug test portions of the game prior to release

***Axelay*'s main programmer** Hideo Ueda has also worked on the *Castlevania*, *Silent Hill* and *Metal Gear Solid* franchises

To get the 'true' ending you need to complete the game on the hard difficulty setting. Completing it on normal results in the mocking message 'Challenge Hard Mode'

Konami's *Axelay* is a landmark shooter in many ways, but the most striking is the fact that it manages to bring intense alien-blasting action to a format that supposedly struggles with the genre. Much has been made over the years of Nintendo's decision to grant the SNES a CPU operating at a mere 3.58MHz – its rival, the Sega Mega Drive, contained a Motorola 68000 processor, which tore along at a comparatively blistering 7.67MHz – and many critics still maintain that this is the reason for the puzzling lack of decent shmups on the system: the sluggish central processor simply cannot cope with multiple enemies and projectiles on the screen all at the same time, they suggest. There's probably a grain of truth in this assumption, but the theory does come somewhat unstuck when you take a look at *Axelay* in glorious motion.

Released back when SNES titles were still leveraging their graphical superiority over Mega Drive software, *Axelay*'s primary draw was its incredible visuals. Few who were around at the time to witness it in motion can forget the powerful spectacle of the unique rolling perspective, which used the SNES's custom graphics chips to create the impression of flying towards a distant horizon. In truth, it wasn't totally convincing, but it was certainly striking and remains so even today.

Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery

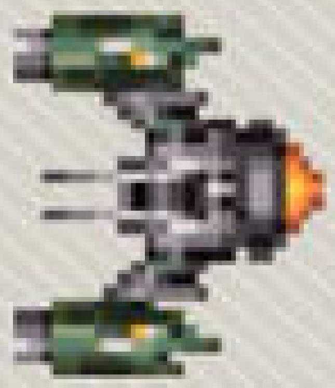
Like *Thunder Force II* and Konami stablemate *Salamander*, *Axelay* alternates between horizontal and side-scrolling levels. This essentially gives shooter addicts the best of both worlds, and both variations offer the same degree of amazing and addictive gameplay. Another constant is the flawless standard of presentation; Mode 7 trickery aside, *Axelay* is a jaw-droppingly gorgeous game and arguably one of the best-looking 16-bit shooters ever created. Not only is the screen awash with highly detailed enemy ships, but the bosses are some of the most memorable ever committed to silicon.

Refreshingly, *Axelay* has top-notch gameplay to back up the appealing aesthetics. Unlike the vast majority of other genre classics, *Axelay* features no weapon or item pick-ups whatsoever. As you advance through the game you gain access to more armaments, which can be loaded onto your craft between missions, but essentially you're given all of the tools you need from the outset of the game. Every situation you encounter during the adventure can be dealt with by switching to one of your three available weapon pods – although naturally some are better at the job than others.

Another unique feature is the way in which your *Axelay* craft

Pixel Perfect

Your guide to the characters of Axelay. How many have you seen?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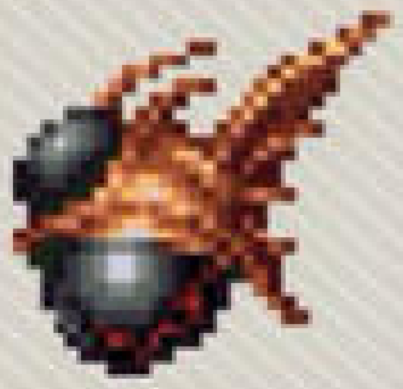
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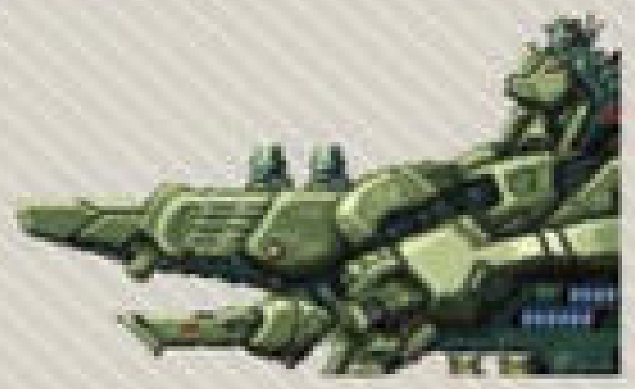
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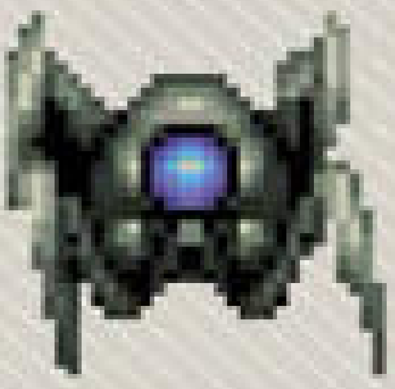
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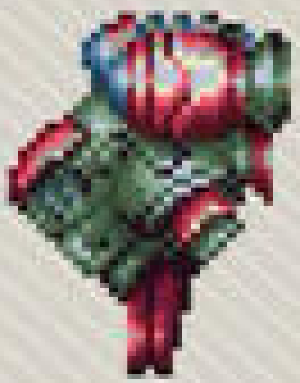
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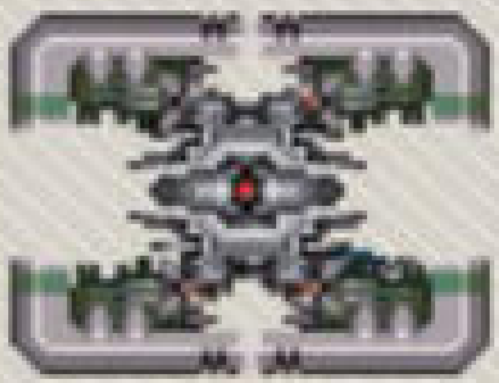
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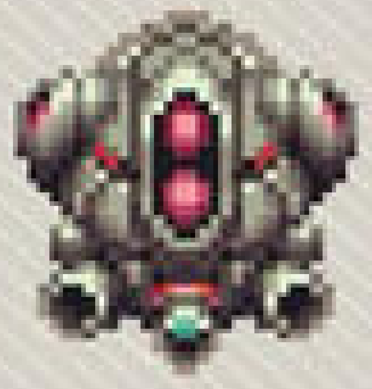
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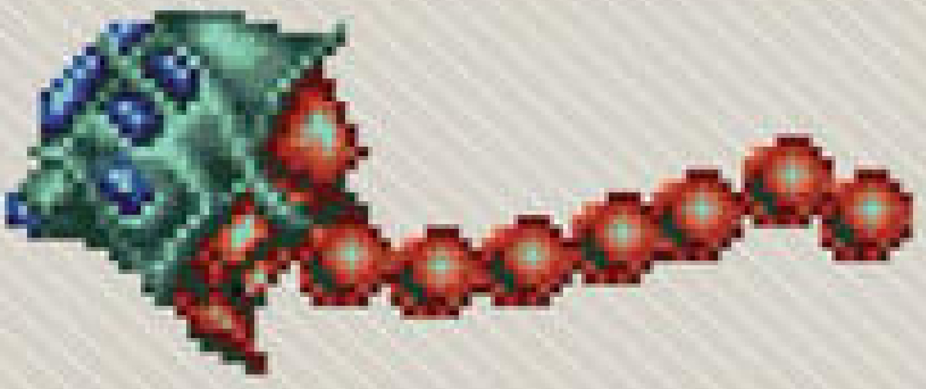
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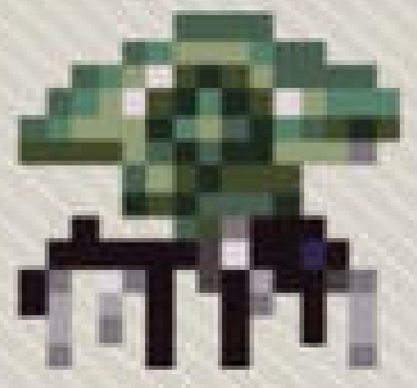
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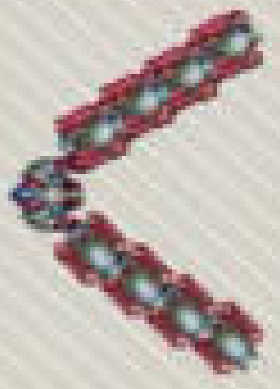
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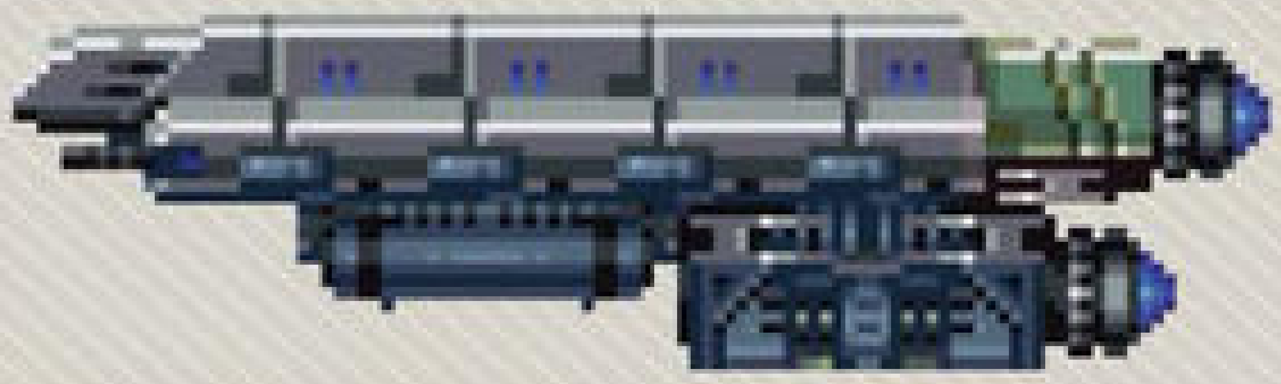
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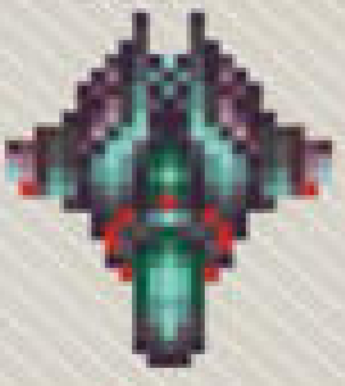
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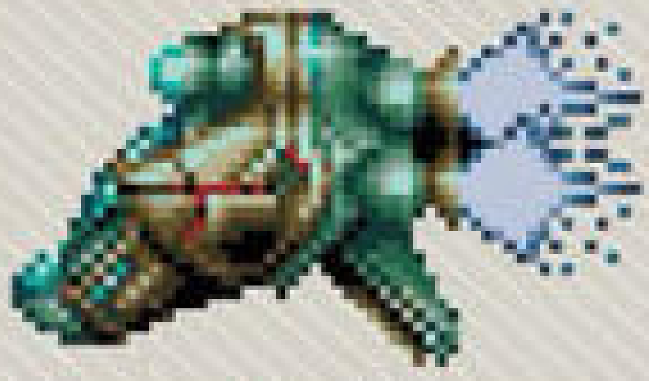
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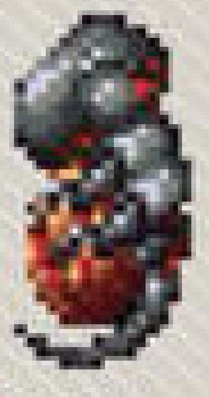
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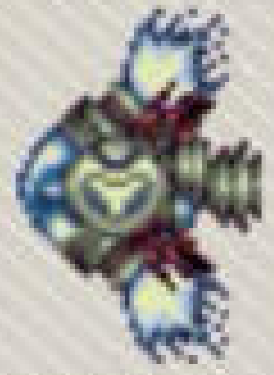
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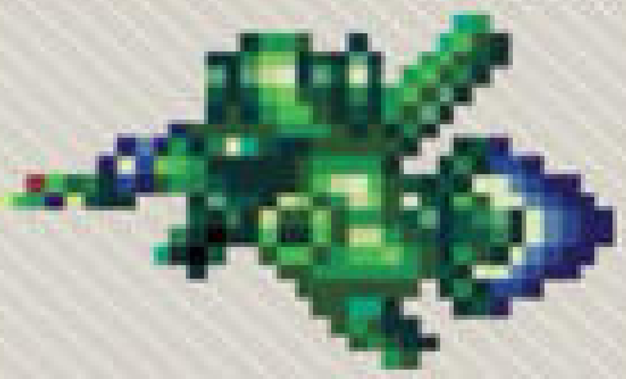
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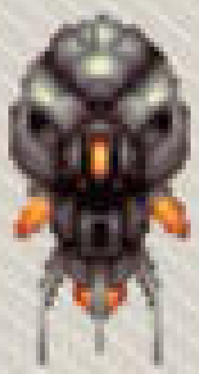
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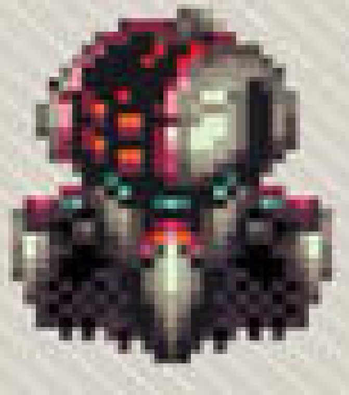
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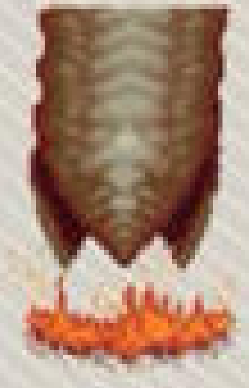
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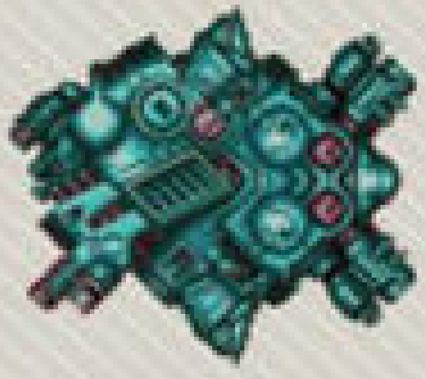
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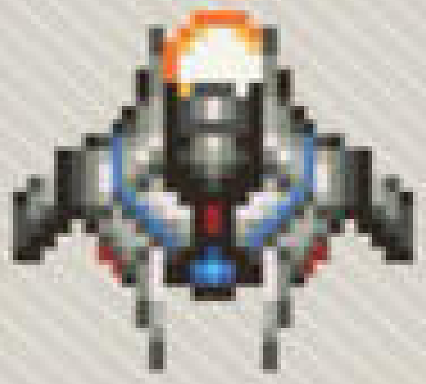
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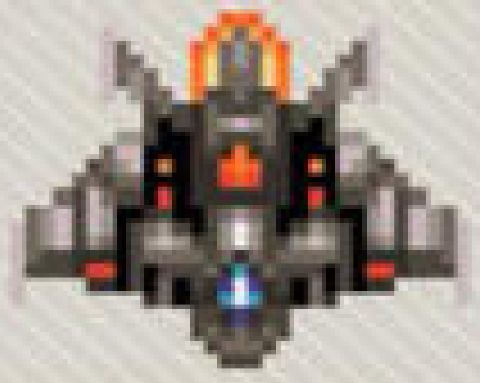
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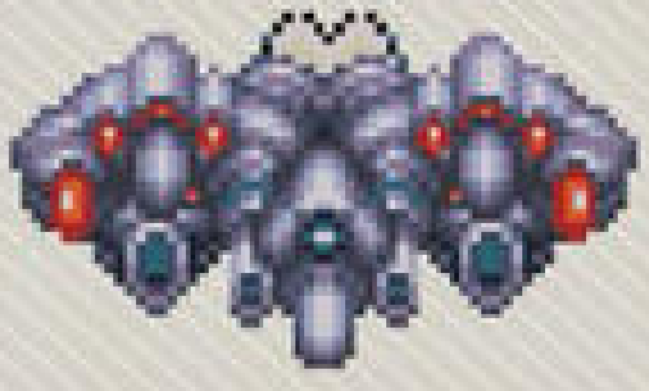
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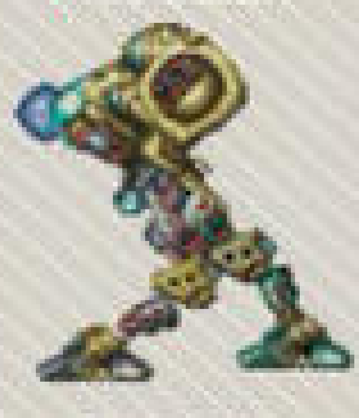
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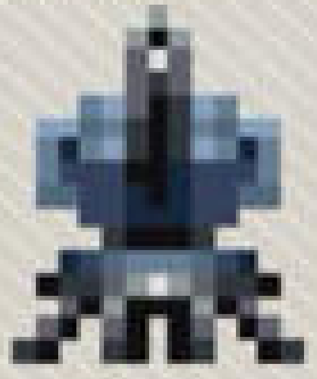
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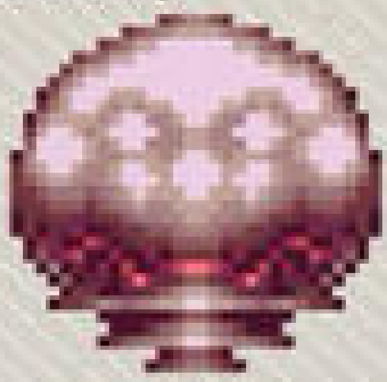
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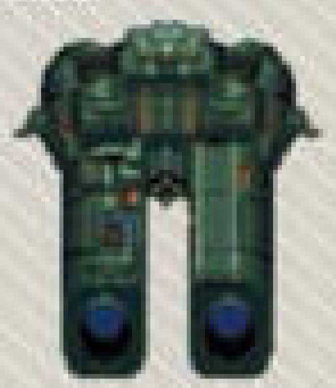
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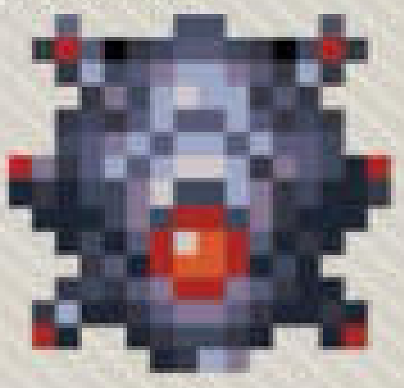
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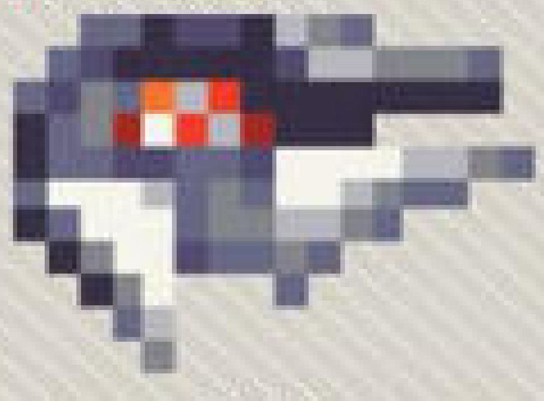
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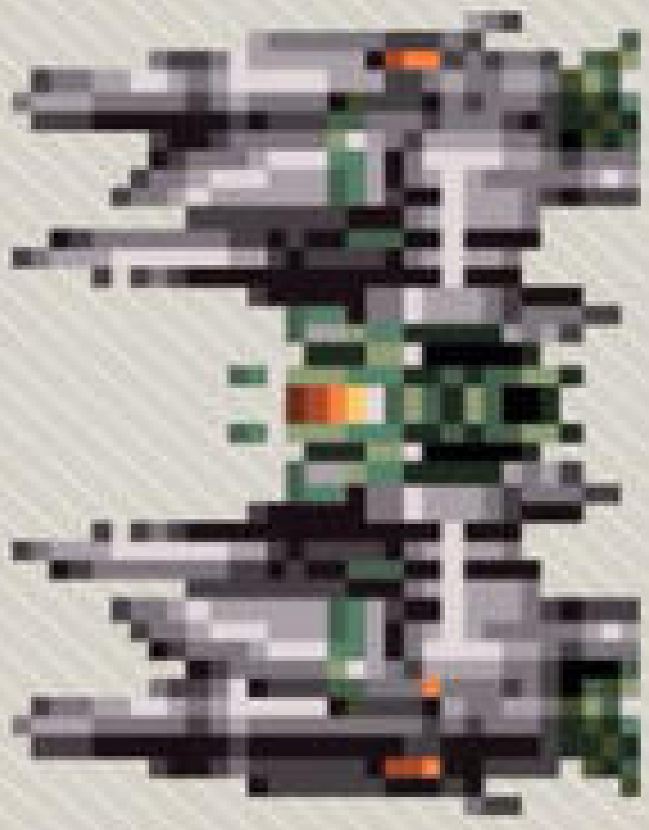
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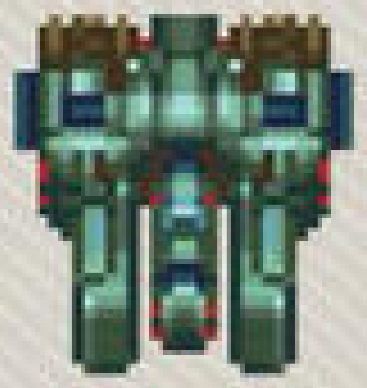
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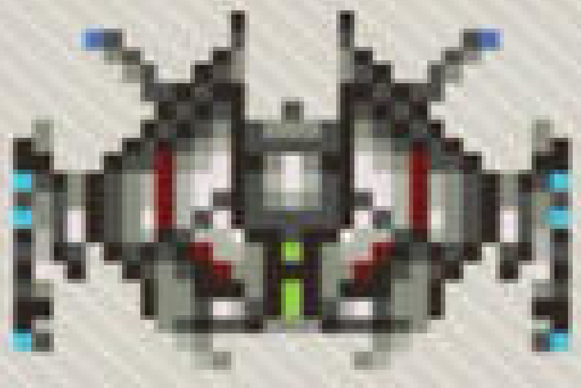
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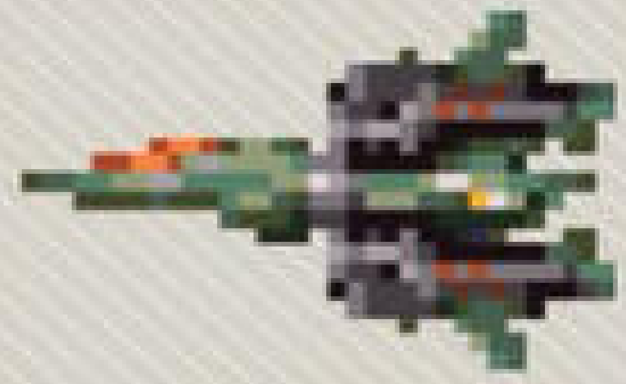
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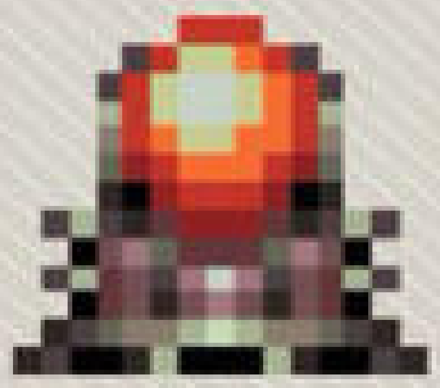
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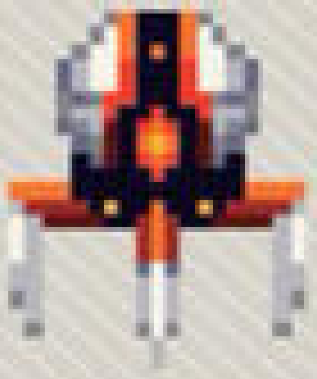
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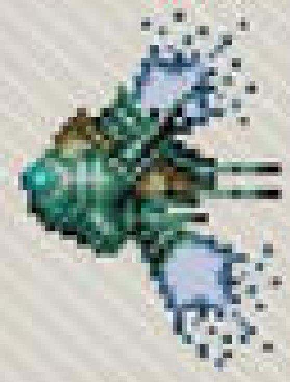
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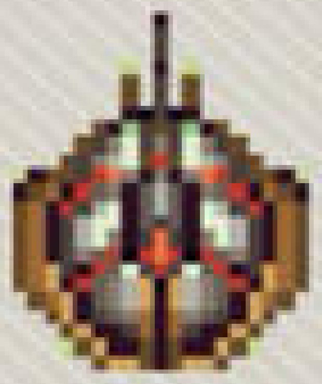
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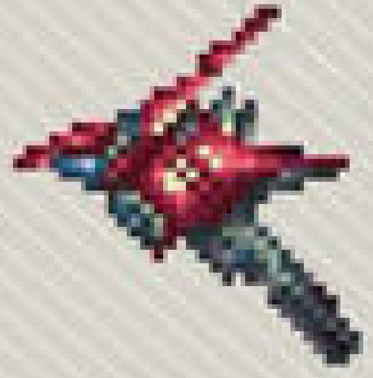
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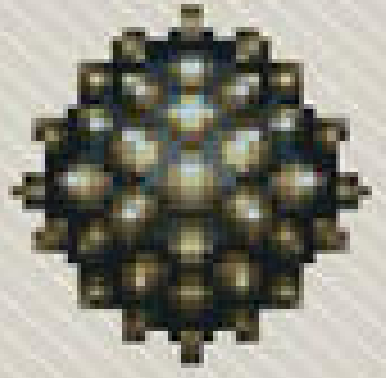
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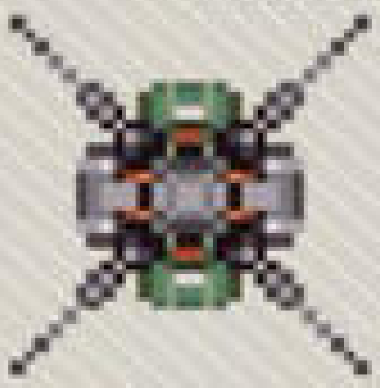
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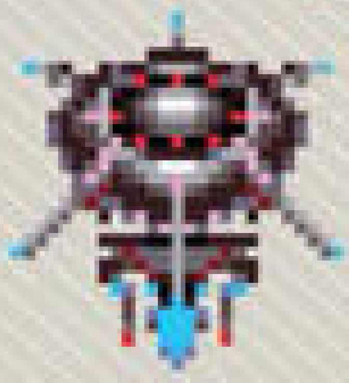
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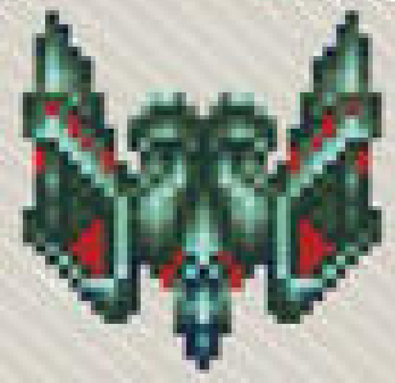
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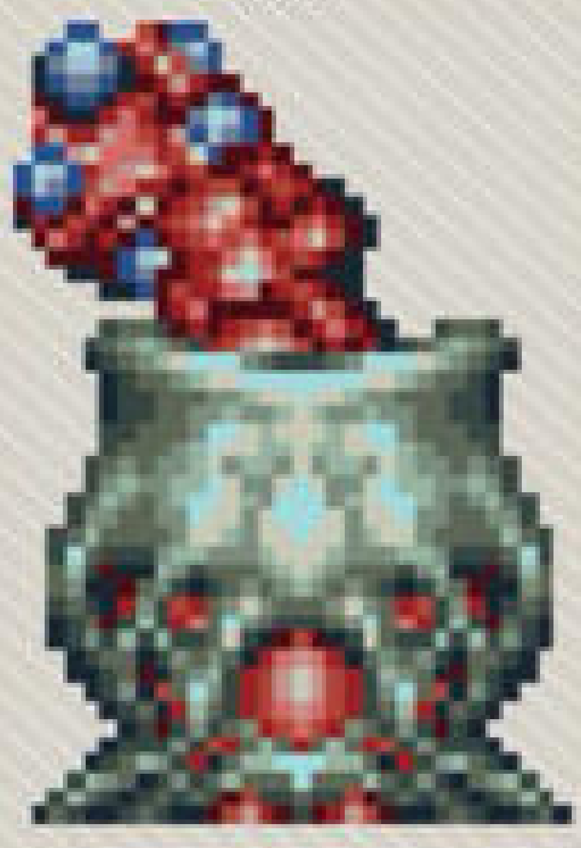
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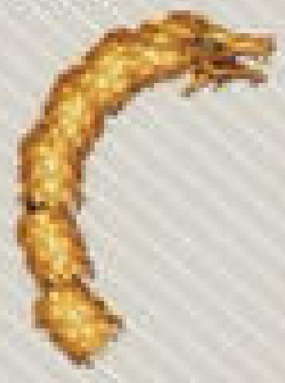
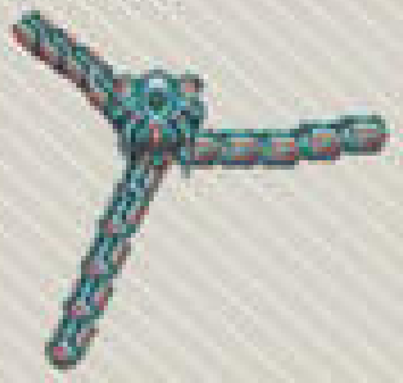
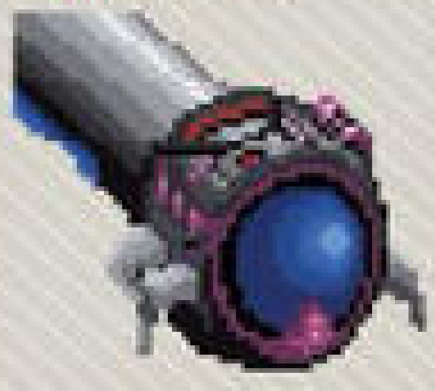
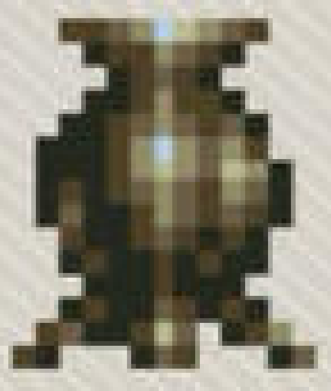
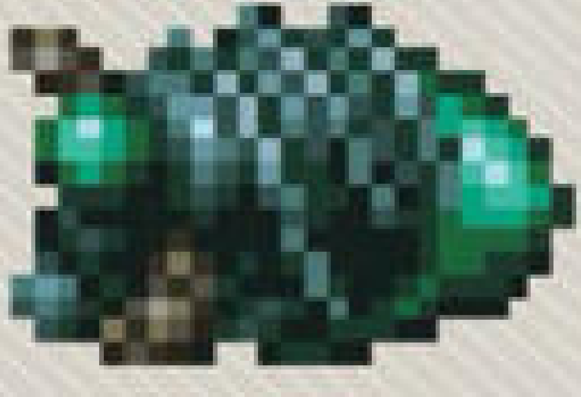
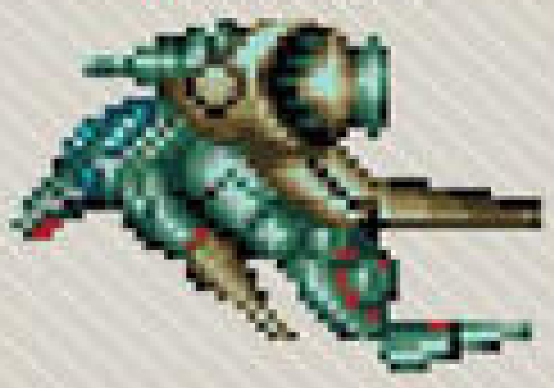

» Flame Dragon

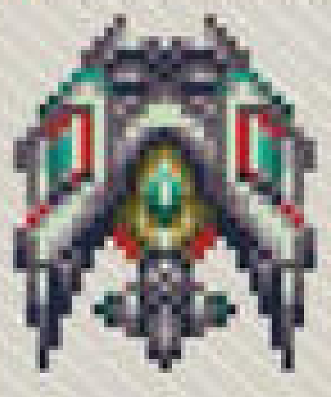

» Tentacle Tracker


» Tube Spider


» Underwater Turret


» Water Grub


» X-77 Jumper


» X-155 StormBringer

Critical Reception

What the gaming press thought…

"It's got the best graphics of any game, on any system. Ever. After seeing it, your friends will be so gobsmacked they'll rush out and buy SNESs of their own"

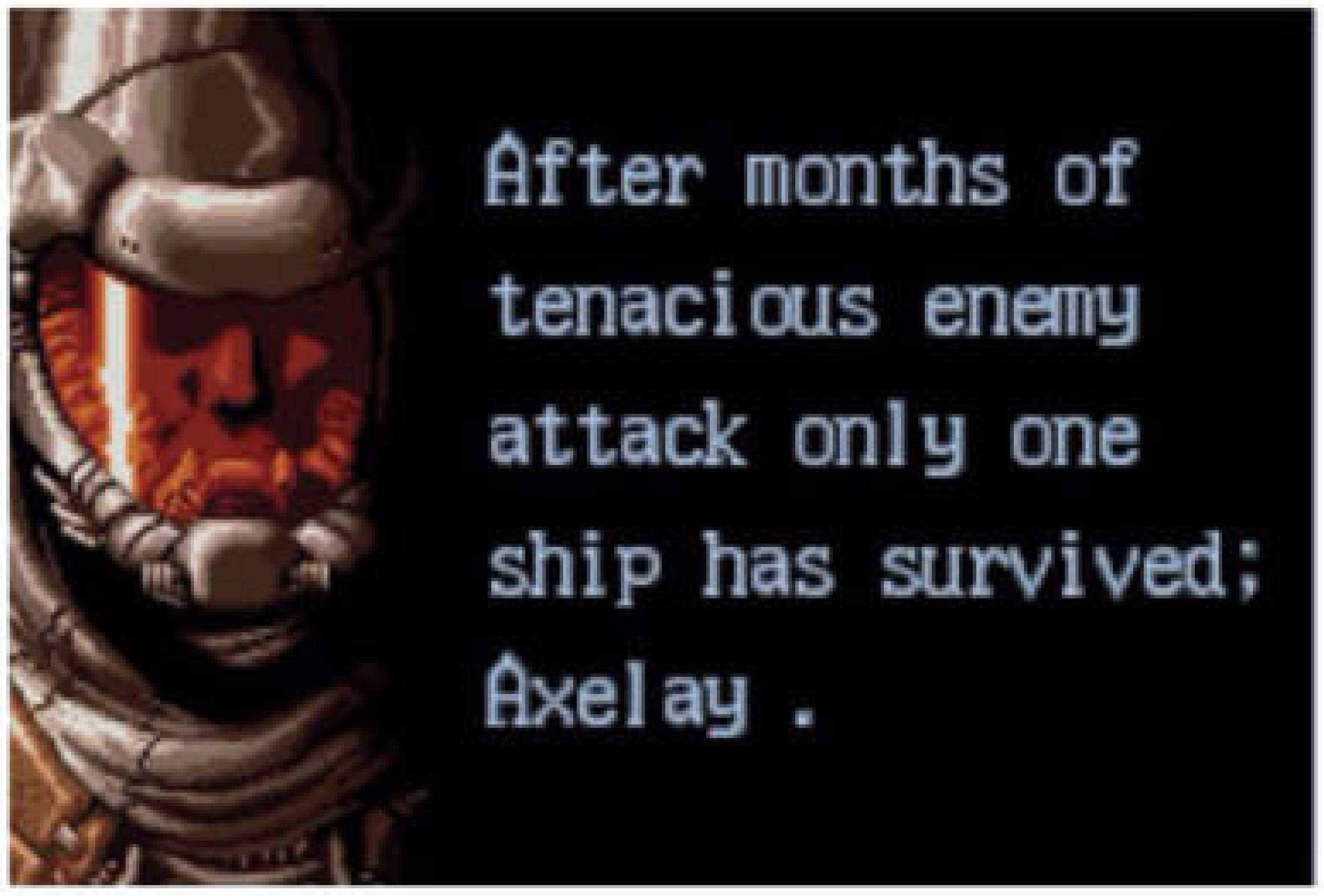
- **SUPER PLAY** 1992

Twin Galaxies High Score

SNES [NTSC]
- **NAME:** PATRICK J DiCESARE
- **POINTS:** 1,974,980

takes damage. Sustaining a direct hit from a projectile doesn't kill you but instead knocks out whatever weapon you have equipped at the time. This means you can take three hits before you lose a life. However, this is balanced by the fact that a direct collision with another craft or part of the environment results in your fighter instantly being ripped asunder in a shower of metal.

When it was launched in 1992, *Axelay* gained incredible praise from all quarters, with the gaming press understandably bowled over by the unique faux-3D scrolling and high standard of presentation. Taro Kudou's perfectly suited soundtrack was also held in high regard and is outstanding, even by today's standards. Given the popularity of the game and its near-dominance of the SNES shooter library, a sequel was almost a given – in fact, the game's ending sequence practically promises a follow-up with the words: 'See you again at *Axelay 2*.' Sadly, despite the rumours and anticipation of fans, Konami never fulfilled that particular pledge. Main programmer Hideo Ueda – who also worked on *TwinBee*, *Quarth* and *Parodius* – remained with the company but Kazuhiko Ishida – who is credited as 'support programmer' on the title – went on to establish Treasure with Masato Maegawa in the same year that *Axelay* was released. It has been a common rumour over the years that other key staffers involved with the game also left Konami with Maegawa and Ishida at the same time, which possibly explains why a planned sequel never materialised.



After months of
tenacious enemy
attack only one
ship has survived;
Axelay .

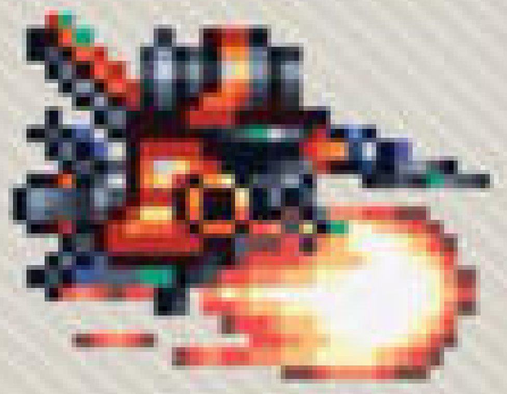
» [SNES] Poor logistics on the part of the Illis System's defence forces, but the setup made for a great shooter.

Best of the best

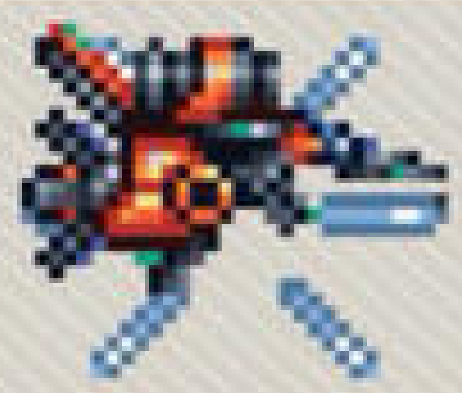
Today *Axelay*'s standing in the shooter world is as high as ever, with the game regularly appearing in polls to ascertain the greatest shmup of all time. It continues to command a fair price on the second-hand market, but thankfully for those of you that don't relish the thought of paying over the odds for a dusty old cartridge, *Axelay* has also been made available via Nintendo's Wii-based Virtual Console service, where its lofty reputation has resulted in it being discovered and appreciated by a whole new legion of new fans.

Axelay's Arsenal

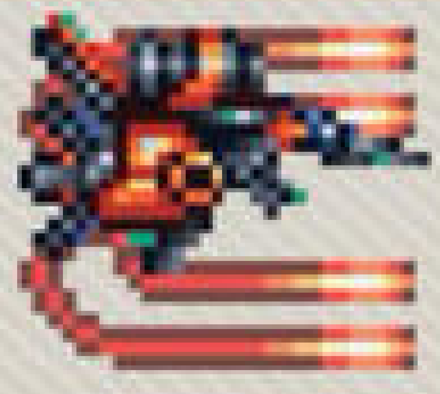
Here's a rundown of the weapon systems available on your top-of-the-line D117B Axelay fighter



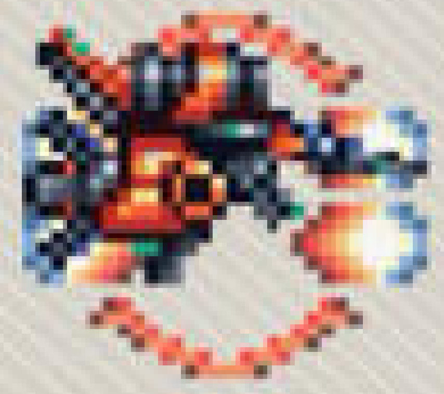
» Straight Laser
A powerful burst of plasma energy, which is one of your first weapons



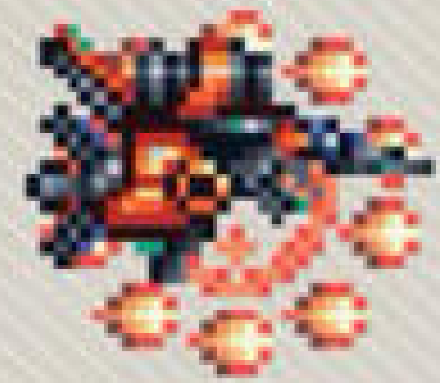
» Needle Cracker
A swift-firing homing weapon, which seeks out enemy units



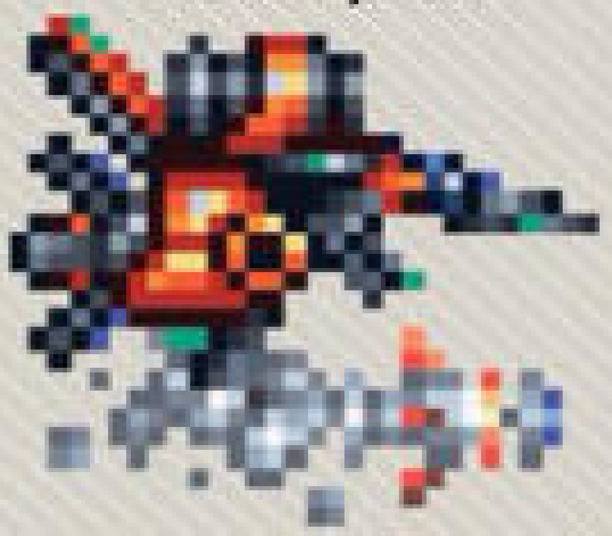
» Wind Laser
The final laser upgrade has a wide range of fire



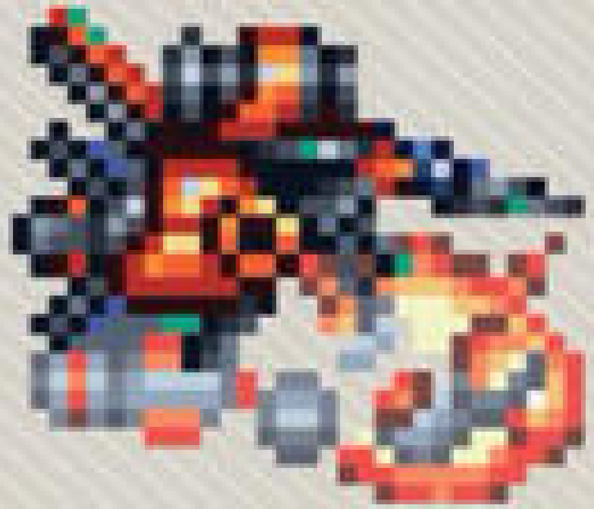
» Round Vulcan
360 degrees of high-velocity death: a vital weapon



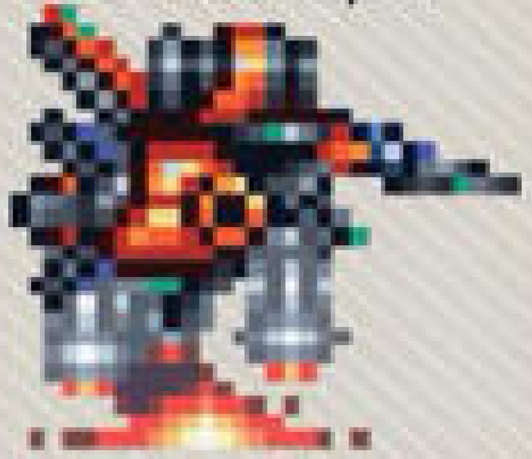
» Morning Star
Another weapon handy for taking out several enemies at once



» Macro Missile
A powerful rocket with a large blast radius



» Explosion Bomb
Air-to-ground missiles useful for taking out gun turrets



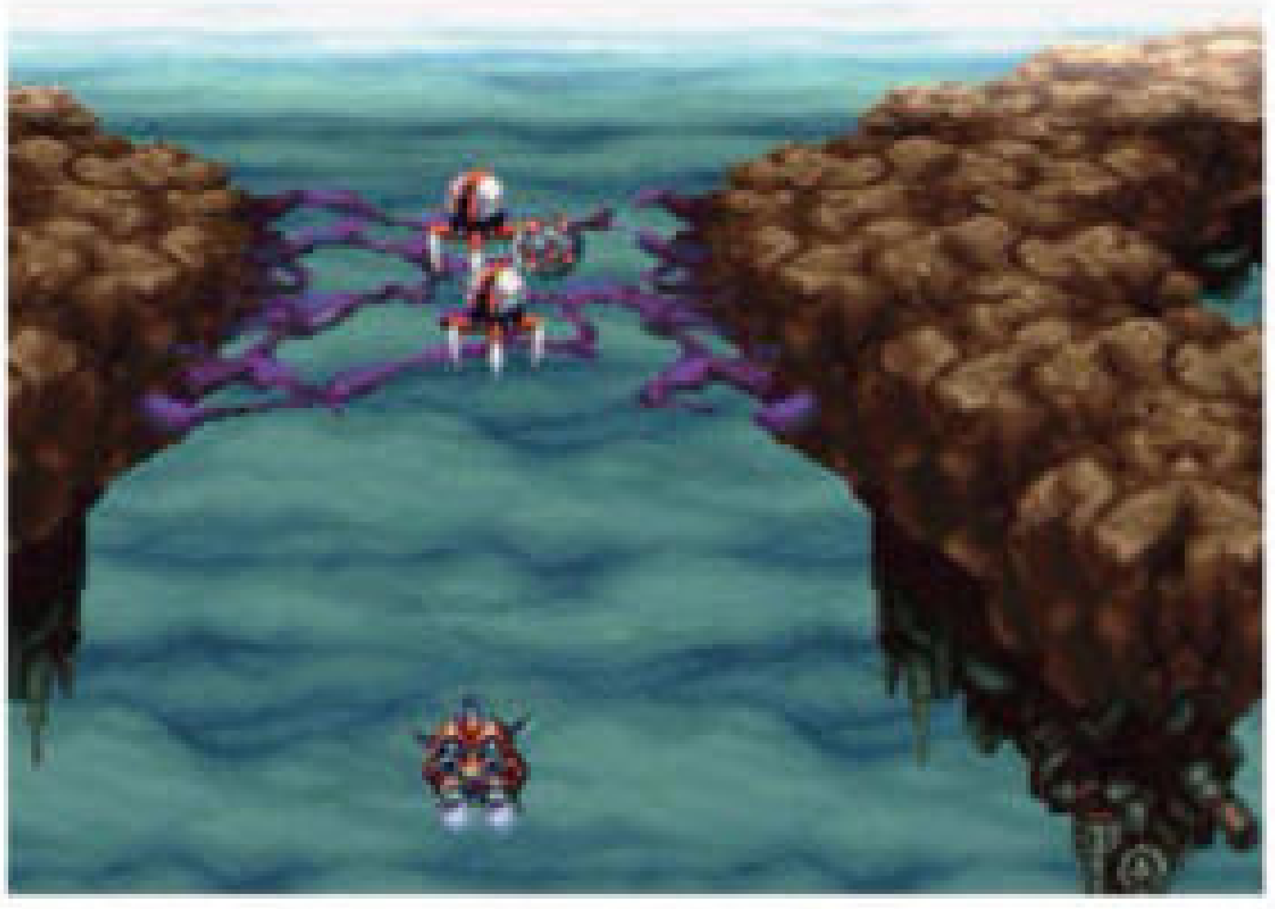
» Cluster Bomb
Quite similar to the Explosion Bomb, but fires backwards

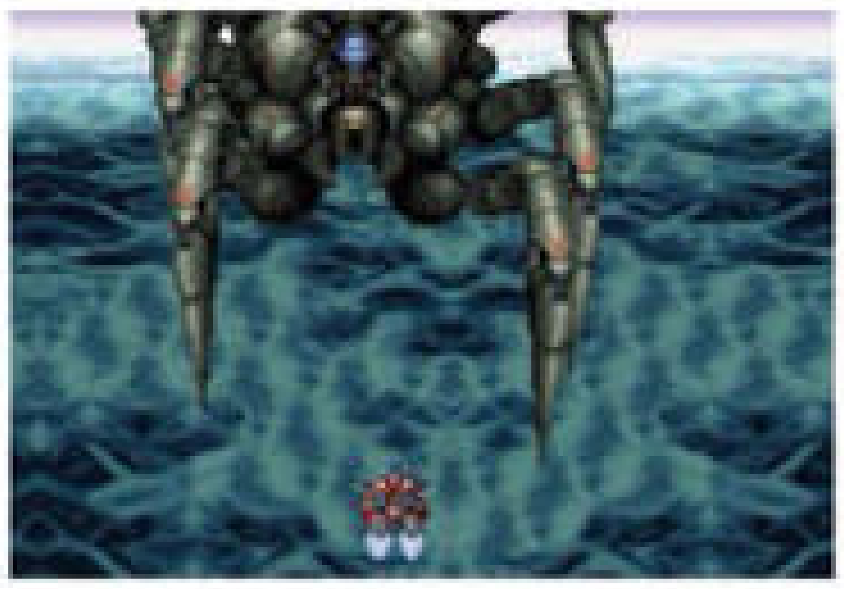
Memorable Moments

Sit back and enjoy Konami's coders let loose on 16-bit hardware

A matter of perspective

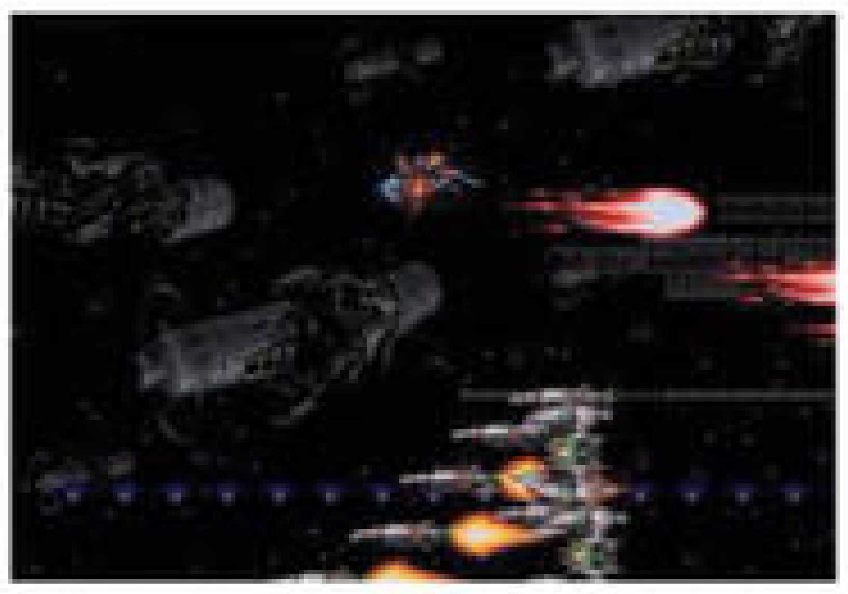
Granted, *Axelay*'s Mode 7 scrolling landscape isn't all that realistic and looks a little outdated, but in 1992 it was astonishing. 2D shooters had always been relatively flat affairs, and Konami's graphical trick was impressive.





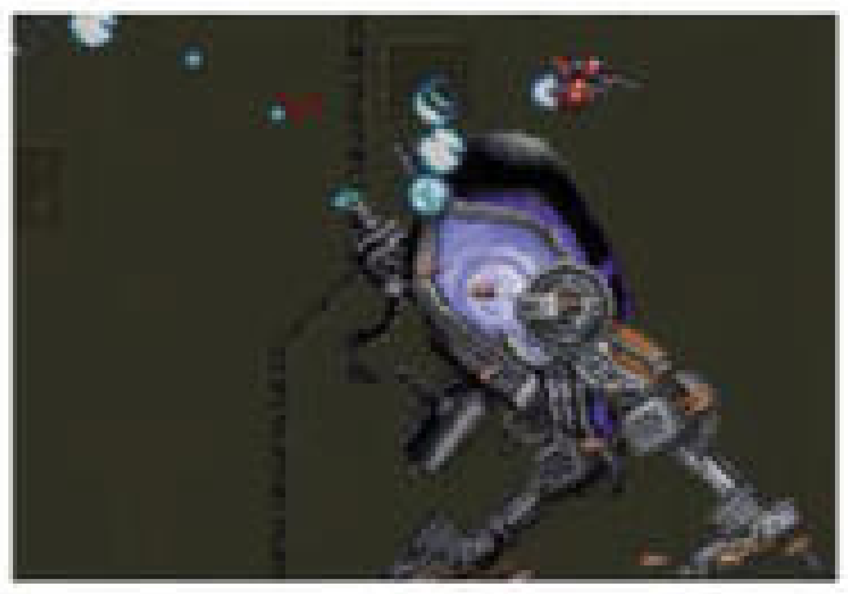
Afraid of spiders

Arachnatron may not be the toughest boss you'll face, but he's one of the most unforgettable. Almost filling the screen, this beastie shows some stunning animation and was a class above the static guardians in most shooters of the era.



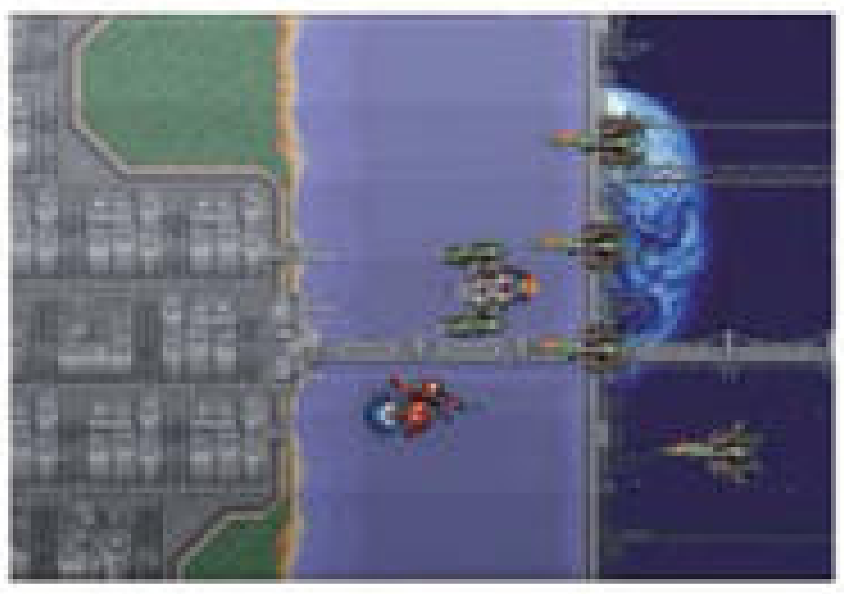
Going sideways

Mixing horizontal and vertical scrolling in shooters wasn't new in 1992 – in fact, Konami had done it before – but that doesn't detract from the shock of entering Level 2 and realising that you're scrolling in a different direction.



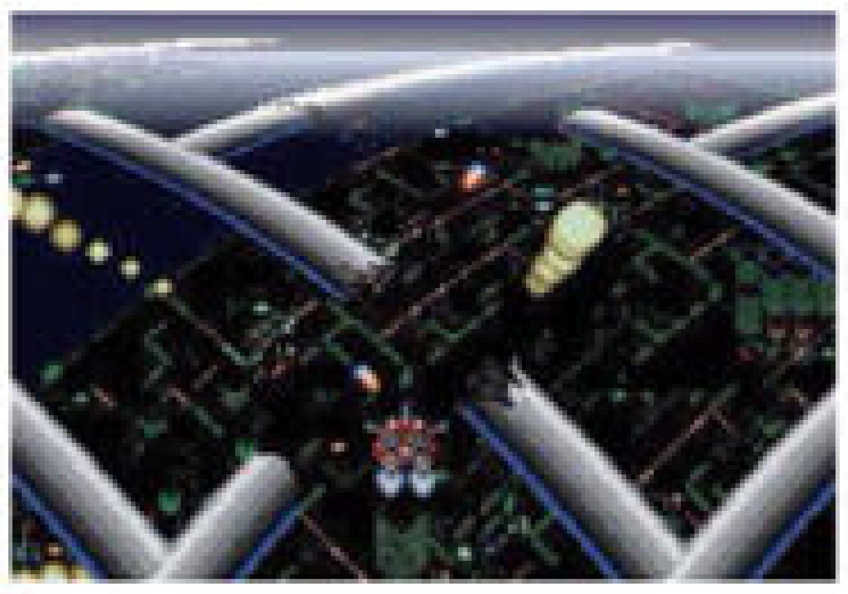
Twenty seconds to comply

In 1992 *RoboCop* was still a household name, and *Axelay*'s second boss is shamelessly based on the scary rogue security bot ED-209. The eerily robotic music further accentuated the rather oppressive nature of this boss battle.



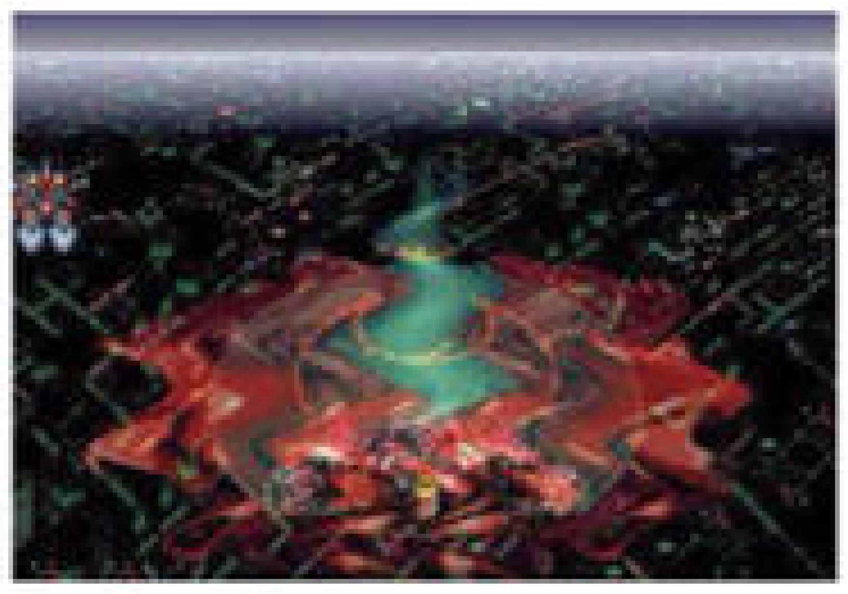
Rings around the world

Level 2 starts off as a typical space station environment, but halfway through you realise that you're in a 'ring world' – a concept made famous in Japanese anime series *Gundam* and the more recent *Halo* titles.



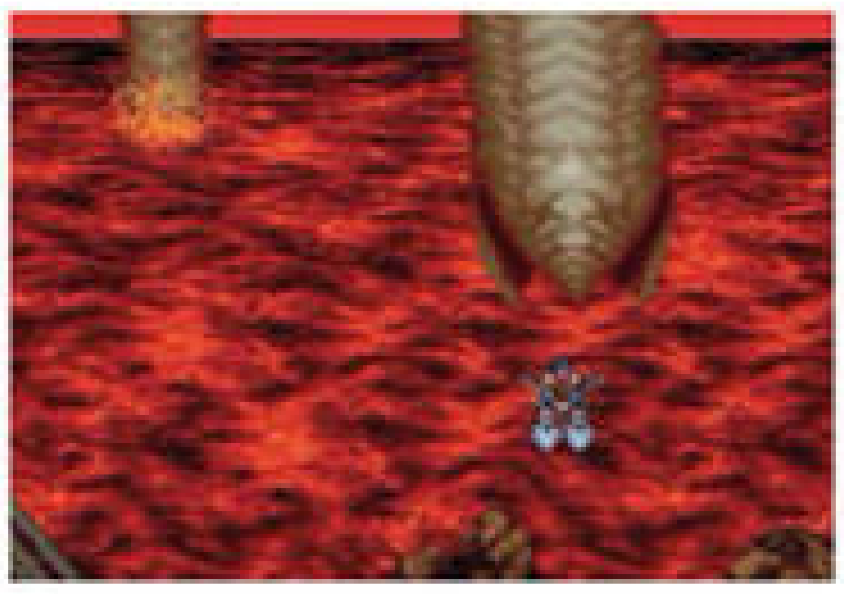
Barrier to entry

Level 3 takes place above the neon lights of a brightly coloured city, but you'll be focused on navigating the vast network of barriers that block your path – taking out the weak segments causes them to plummet towards the ground.



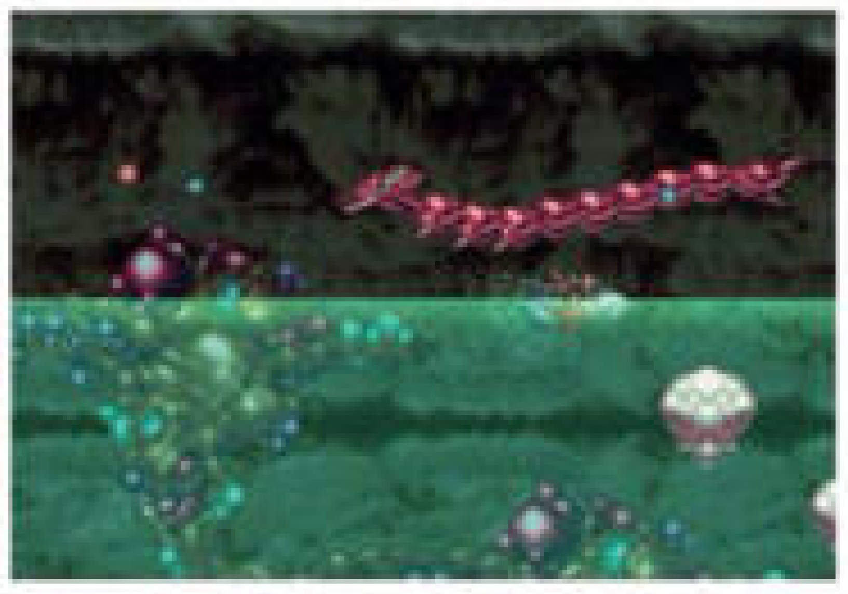
Don't go changing

The third boss that you face starts off looking anything but fearsome, but after taking a beating he morphs into a massive battle station thanks to the incredible graphical power of Nintendo's 16-bit hardware.



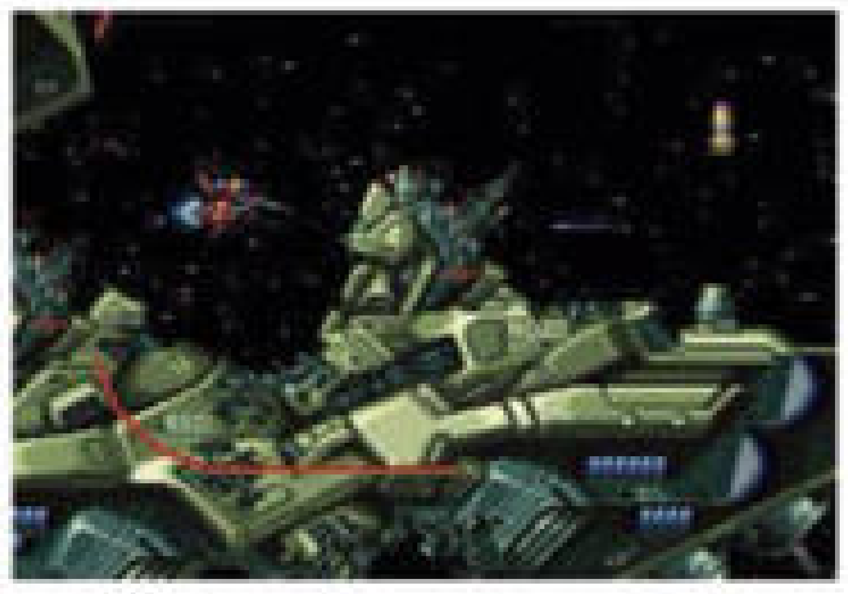
I got worms

Someone at Konami was clearly a Frank Herbert fan, because Level 5 features some massive worms that bear more than a passing resemblance to those witnessed in the author's legendary sci-fi epic *Dune*.



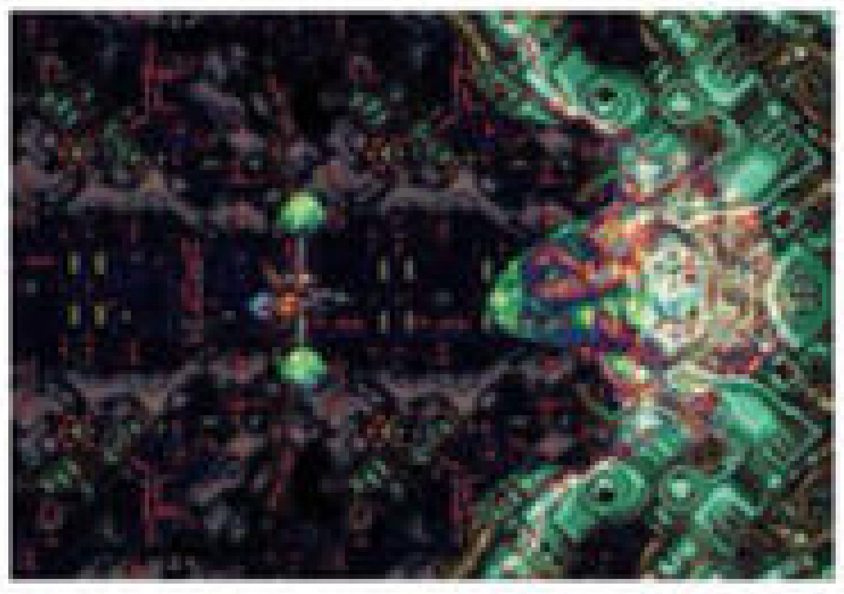
Skimming the surface

Every decent shooter needs an underwater segment, and *Axelay* has one in Level 4. Placing your ship above the surface of the water causes water to splash up; just one of many awesome graphical effects in the game.



You and whose army?

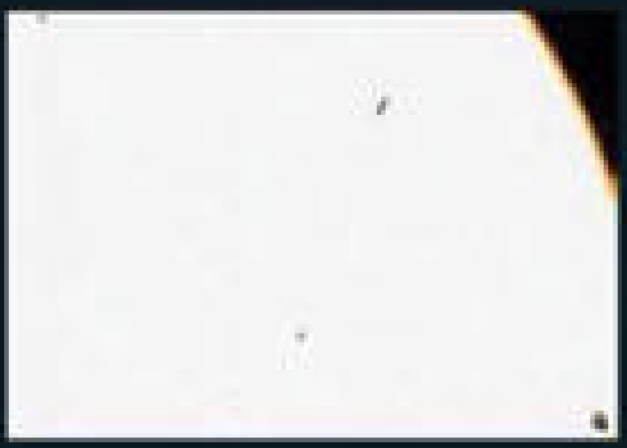
The final stage throws you in at the deep end, fighting against a bunch of ships so large that they don't even fit on the screen. In terms of pure spectacle it's one of the game's most impressive moments.

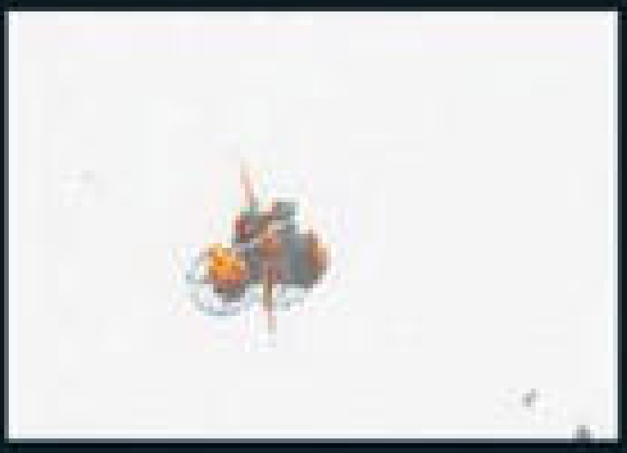


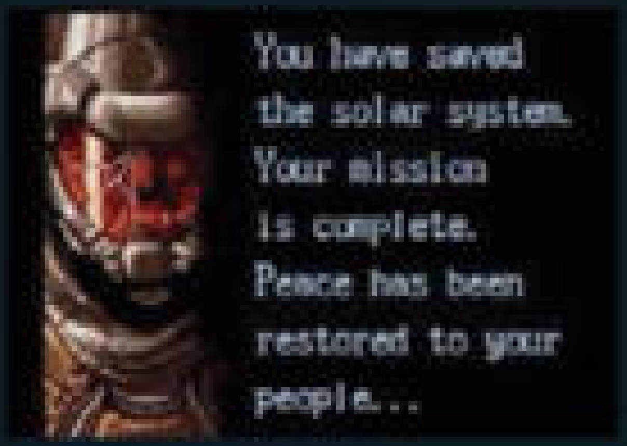
Copycat

The final boss is a sneaky fellow and even goes as far as to replicate your ship and use clones against you. Seeing his scanning field appear and methodically copy your craft is a terrifying – but nonetheless impressive – event.

> After blowing away the evil enemy leader you're left to reflect on your incredible accomplishment. The effort was worth it, as you've single-handedly saved an entire star system from the unspeakable horrors of alien oppression. In other words, you're something of a diamond geezer.







You have saved
the solar system.
Your mission
is complete.
Peace has been
restored to your
people...

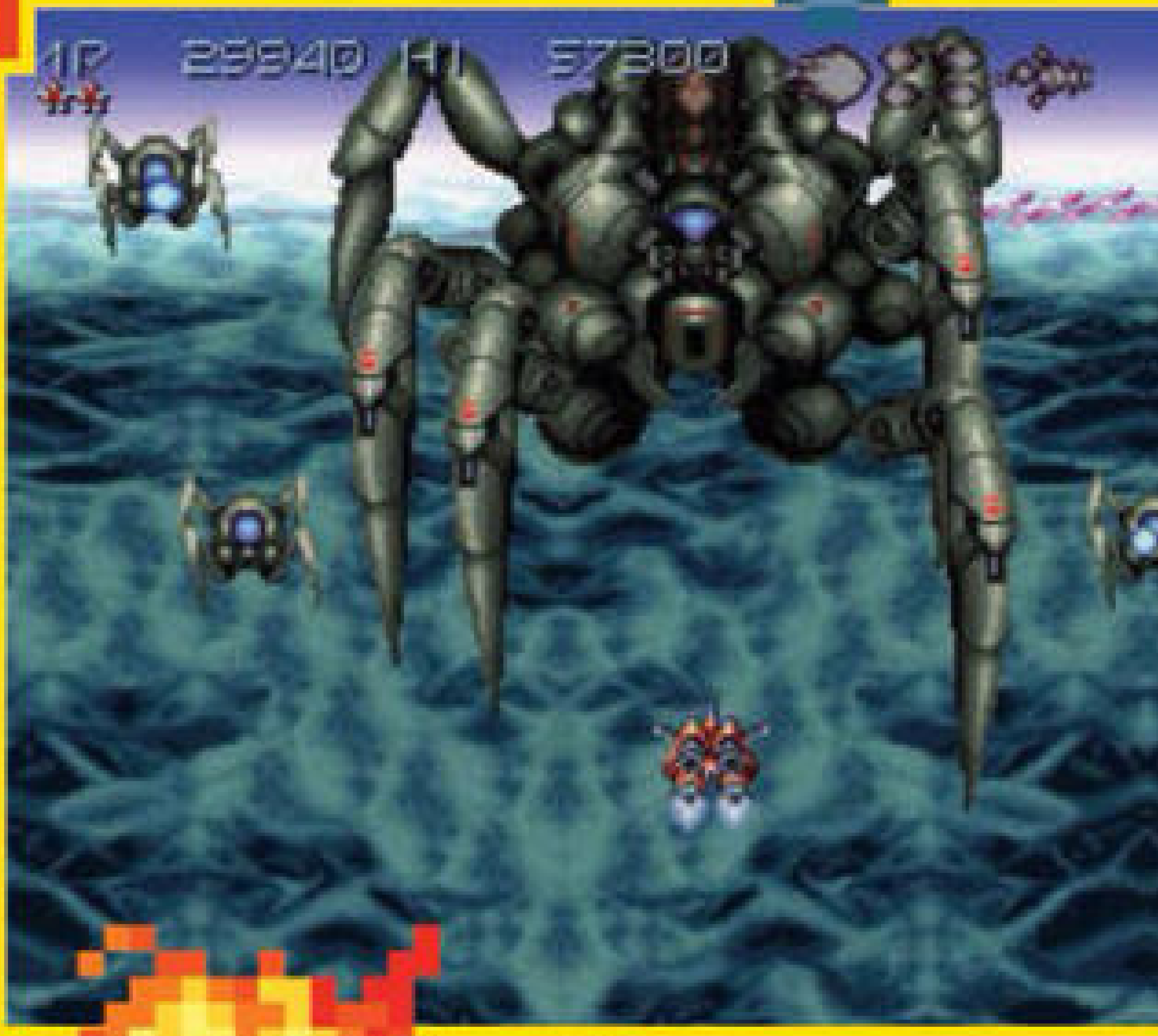
Boss Rush

Many shmup aficionados would argue that a blaster lives and dies by the quality of its boss encounters, and *Axelay* certainly doesn't disappoint in this department. As well as a truly fearsome number of mid-level bosses, the game boasts some of the most unforgettable level guardians to grace the 16-bit era. These epic enemies are notable not only for their variety and cunning tactics, but for allowing the SNES to showcase some of its most impressive visual tricks, with sprite rotation, Mode 7 scaling and smooth animation. Here's a rundown of the supreme beings waiting for you at the conclusions of *Axelay*'s levels.

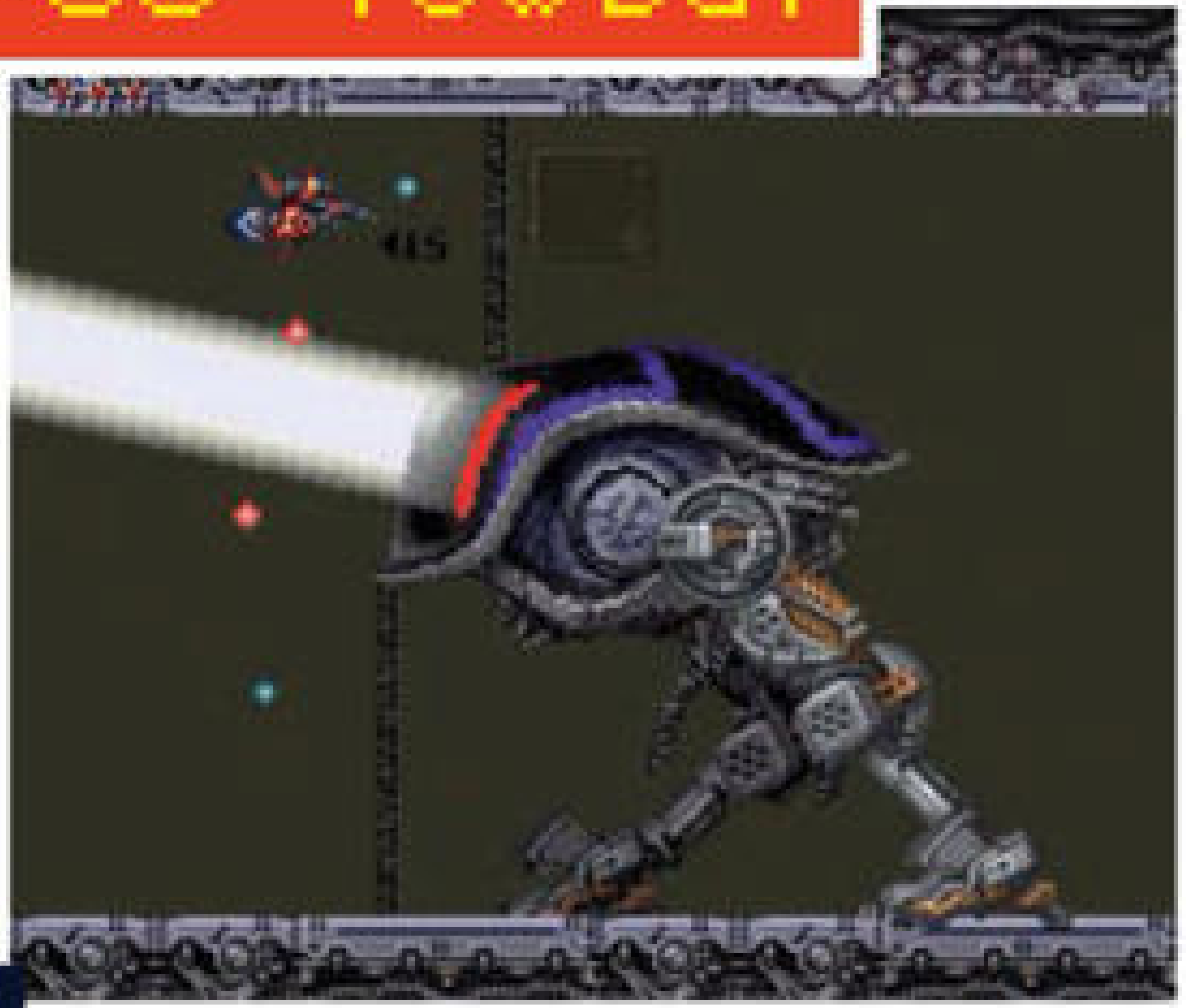
Arachnatron

Stage One - Cumuluses

Throughout the history of shooters there has been a custom of memorable opening bosses, and the mechanical spider that waits at the conclusion of *Axelay*'s first level certainly conforms to that tradition. Boasting spookily authentic animation thanks to its multi-jointed nature – each limb is a separate sprite – and a fearsome phalanx of baby spider robots supporting from the rear, it's no wonder that Arachnatron has remained indelibly inked in the memory of many a SNES gamer. Naturally, its status as the game's debut boss encounter results in a relatively low degree of difficulty: the tractor-beam web that Archanatron occasionally spits out slows your ship down, making it harder to dodge incoming projectiles, but on the whole you'll find this chap looks a lot more scary than he actually is. Focus all of your firepower on the mouth section initially because, once you destroy it, the web can no longer be fired. After this you should throw all of your available weaponry at the eye, which is the spider's weak spot.

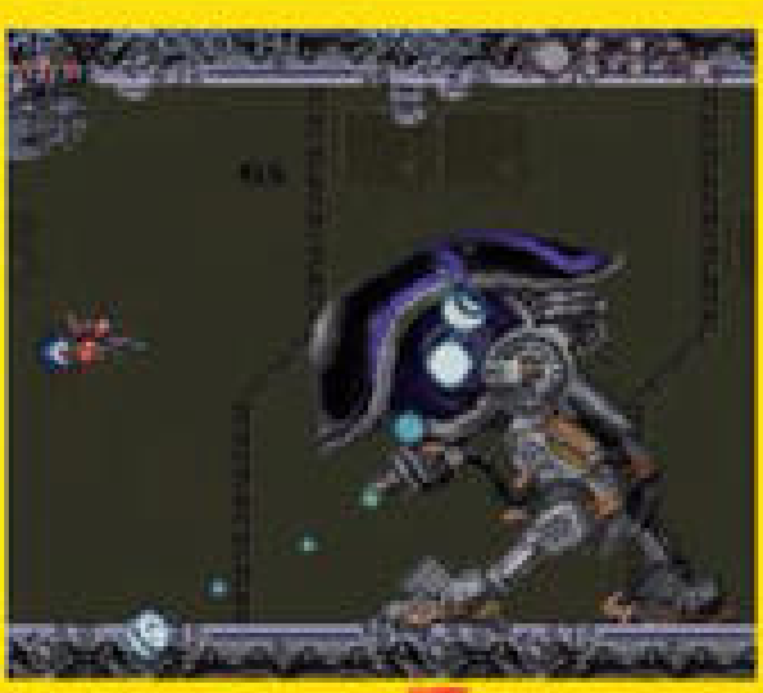


T-36 Towbar



Stage Two - Tralieb Colony

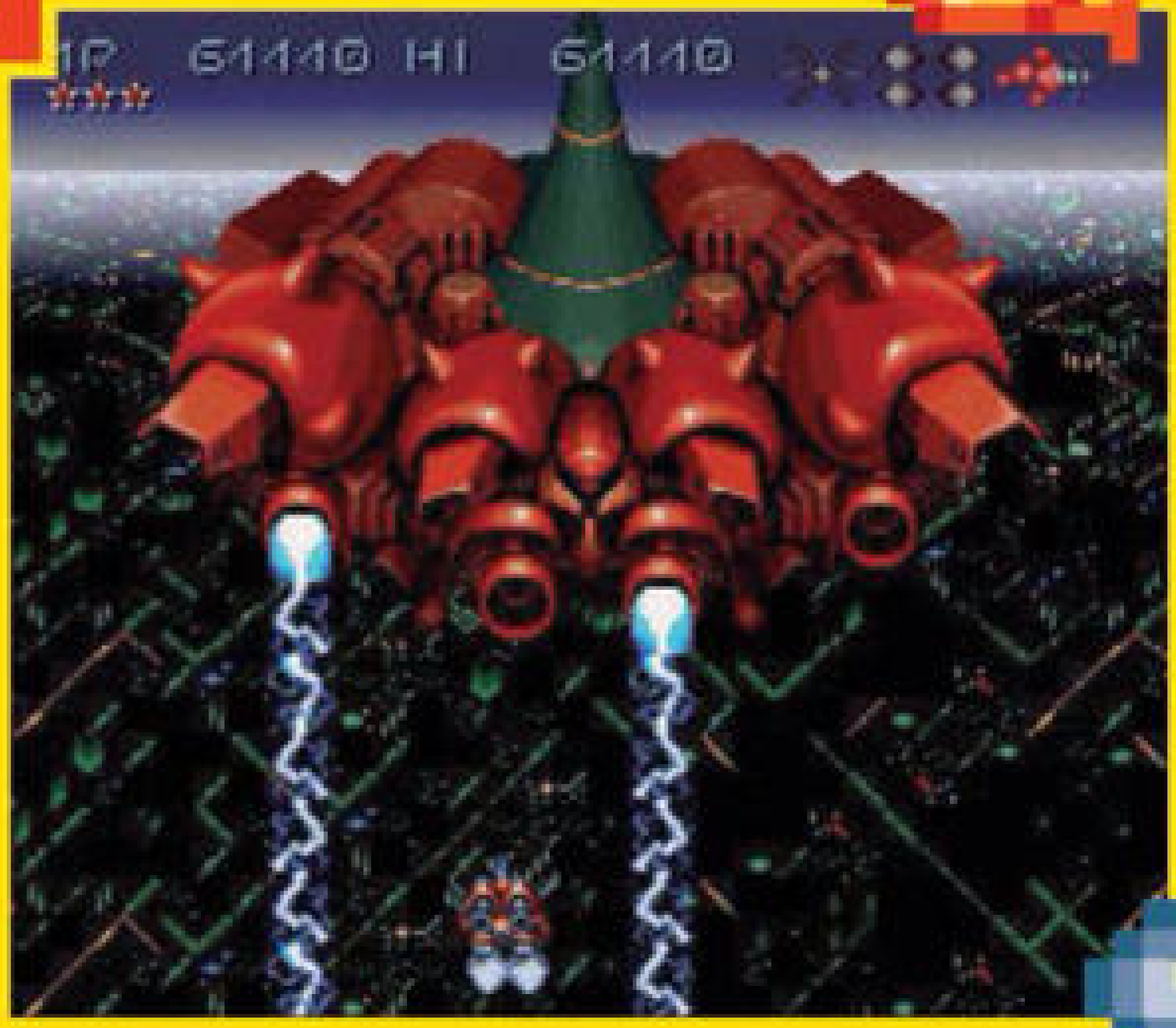
Bearing an uncanny resemblance to bipedal *RoboCop* antagonist ED-209, the T-36 Towbar lurks in a battered and derelict portion at the end of the Tralieb Colony. Animated using a combination of sprites and smoothly rotating Mode 7 effects, this two-legged monster slowly stumbles backwards along the corridor, stopping every so often to attempt to blow your fragile craft out of the air. When Towbar pauses to attack, make sure you're high up near the ceiling of the level. He will either shoot with his machine gun, which can be blasted off if you feel like adjusting the odds in your favour, or engage his deadly laser beam attack. Both attacks can be angled, so you'll need to make sure you're in the top-right corner of the screen to avoid being vaporised. Towbar's weak spot is the exposed motor unit just behind his protective hood; the explosive nature of your missiles or bombs can penetrate his defensives for massive damage. This resourceful enemy is also capable of hurling smaller projectiles your way, so don't let your guard down.

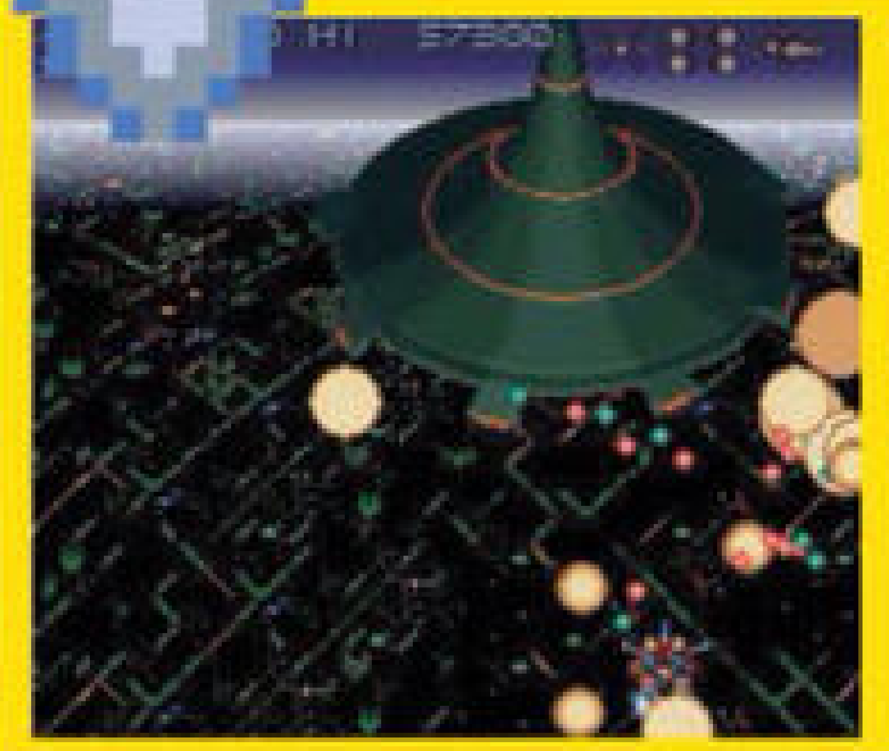


Regenertoid

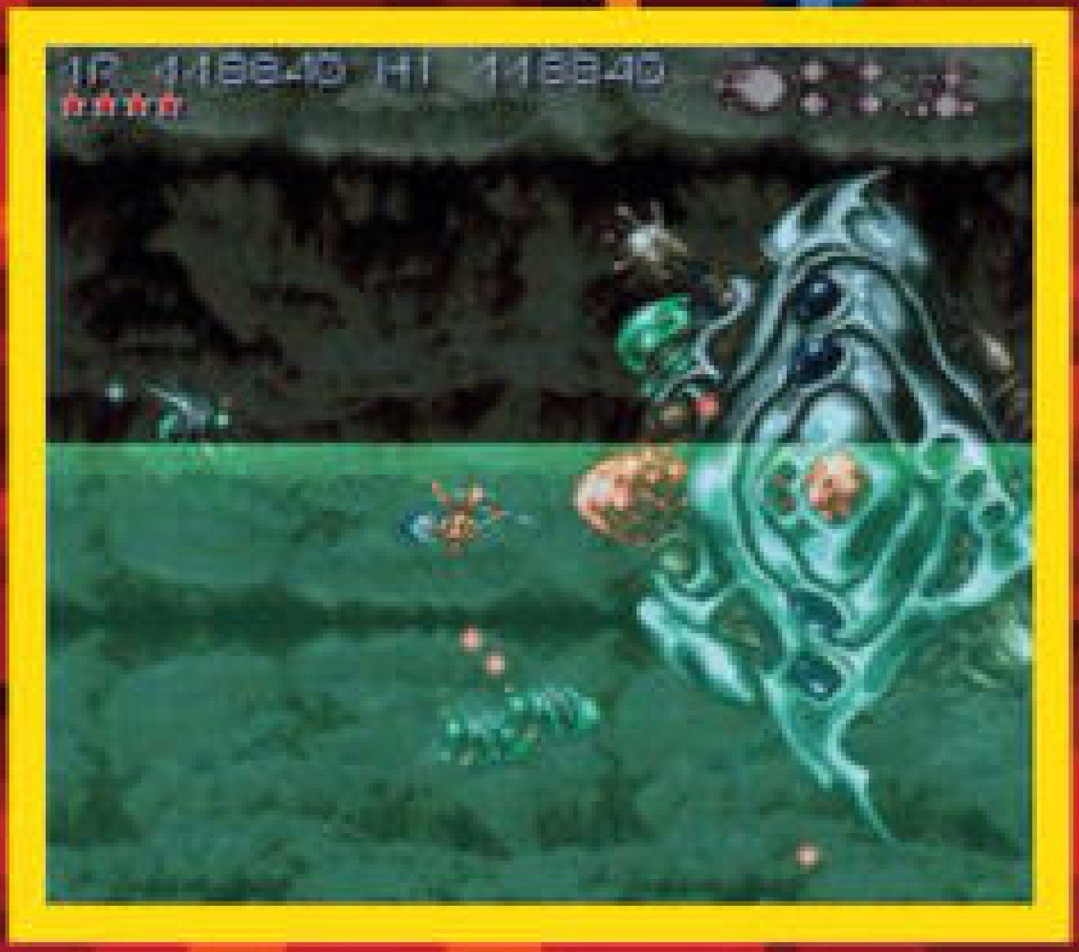
Stage Three - Urbanite

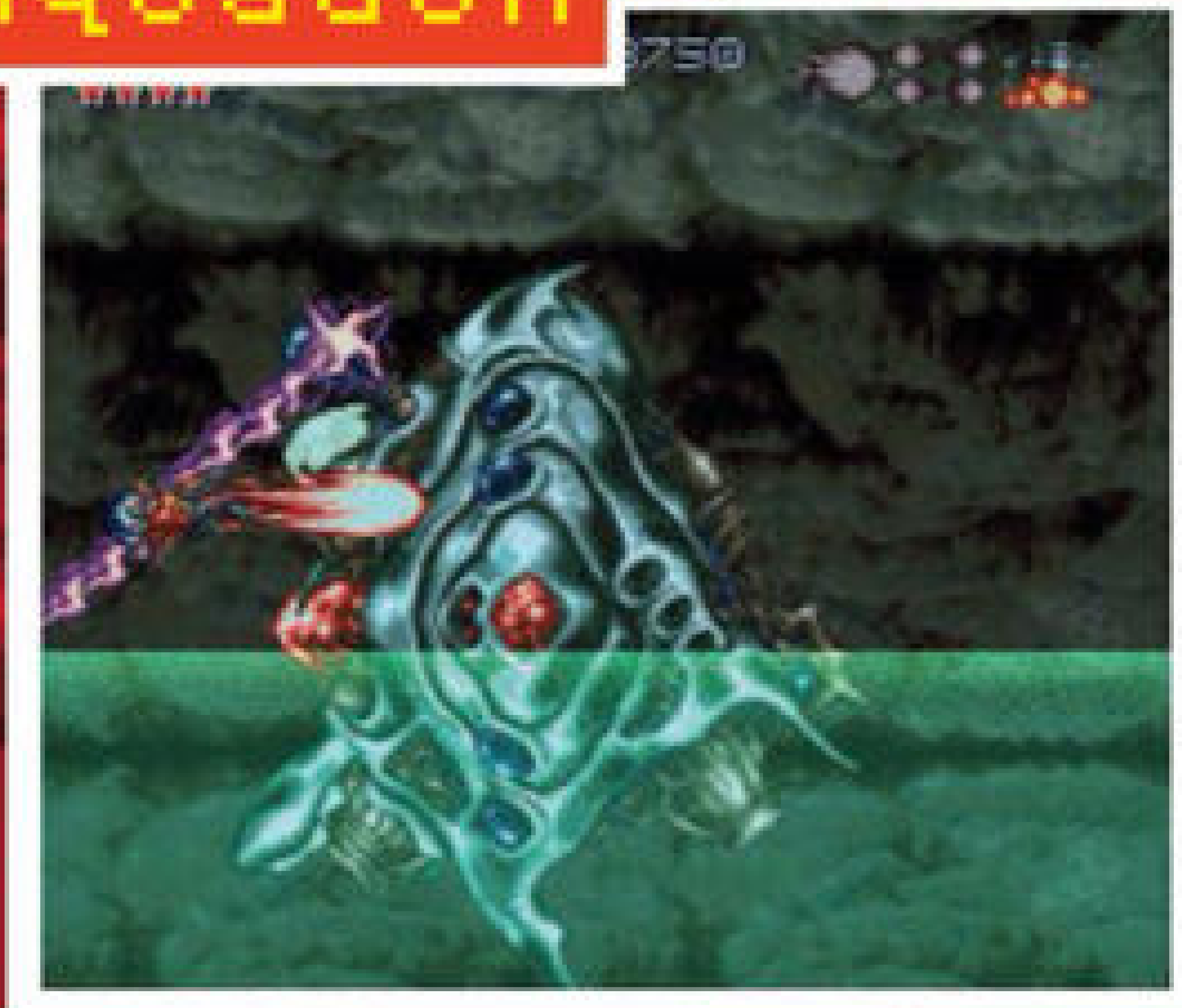
This end-of-level boss starts off in a rather underwhelming fashion, teleporting onto the screen as a tiny ship before changing into the shape of a spinning top. What it lacks in visual impact it makes up for in raw aggression, though – you'll need to take out the various gun ports on the rim of Regenertoid to put a stop to the hail of bullets that it spews out. Doing this also triggers the second stage of the attack: the rather pathetic cone-like shape is augmented by fearsome red battle armour, complete with devastating laser cannons that fill up large portions of the screen when fired – just make sure you're not anywhere near them at the time. Focus your attack on the centre of Regenertoid's shell and you'll send it packing in next to no time, but make sure you keep moving because this monster's massive size means that on-screen real estate is kept to a bare minimum, making it hard to manoeuvre.





Aquadon





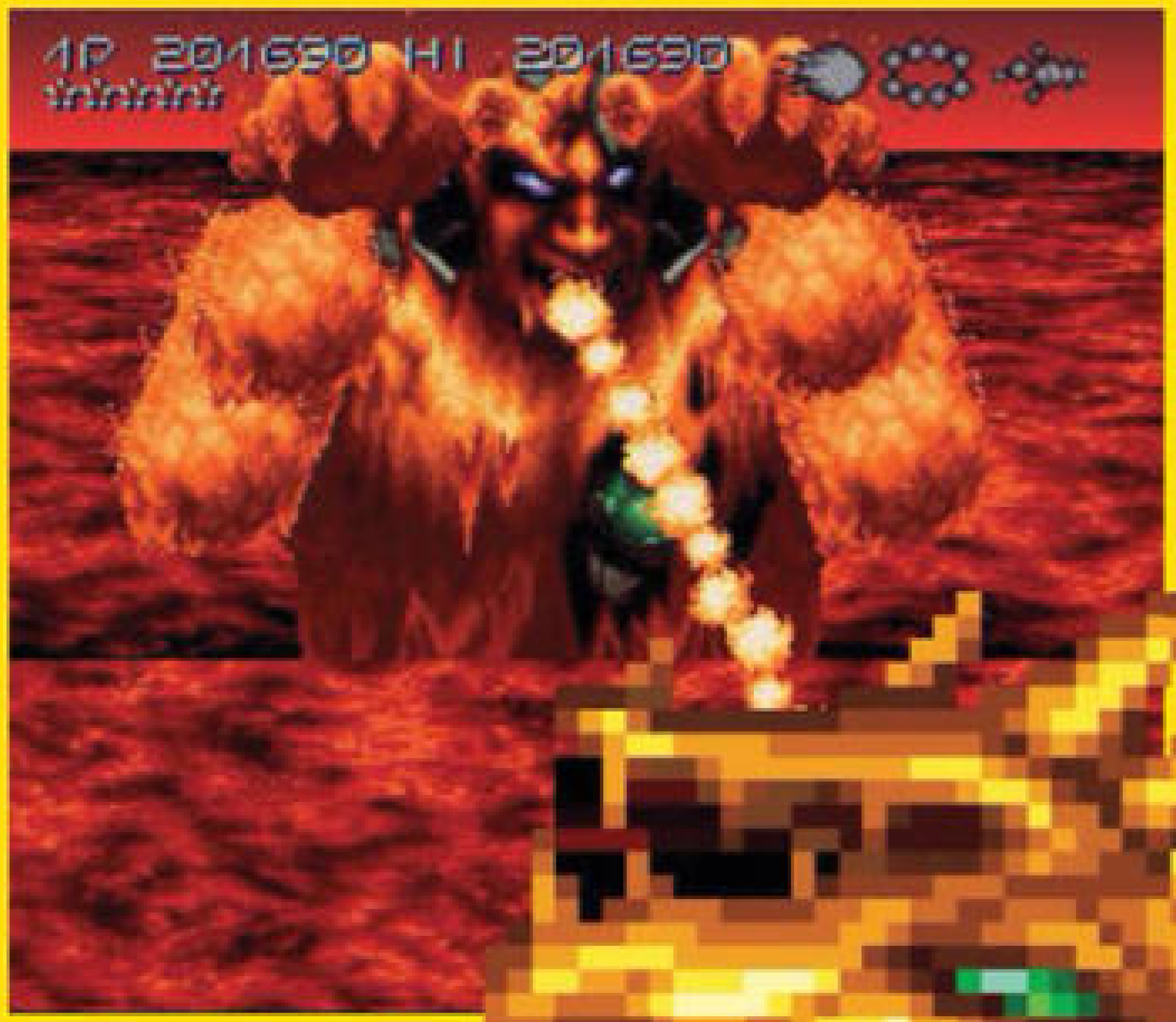
Stage Four - The Cavern

Looking every inch like the kind of crustacean you'd run a mile from if you ever encountered it on a beach, Aquadon ramps up the difficulty level with his multiple attack capabilities. If you don't get taken out by the needle laser blasts and procession of unfriendly minions that swarm around his thick shell, you'll still have to face the prospect of being zapped by his irksome lightning bolt attack. While this isn't deadly in itself, it stuns your craft temporarily and causes your weapons system to go haywire, which often means you'll end up with an attack that is woefully mismatched for the situation, forcing you to quickly re-select the correct armament. Aquadon has two weak spots, both of which must be pushed backwards into his shell before the other opens up. You'll need to pay close attention to which weak spot is exposed at any one time, as you'll more often than not be looking elsewhere on the screen to avoid the many hostile objects flying in your general direction.

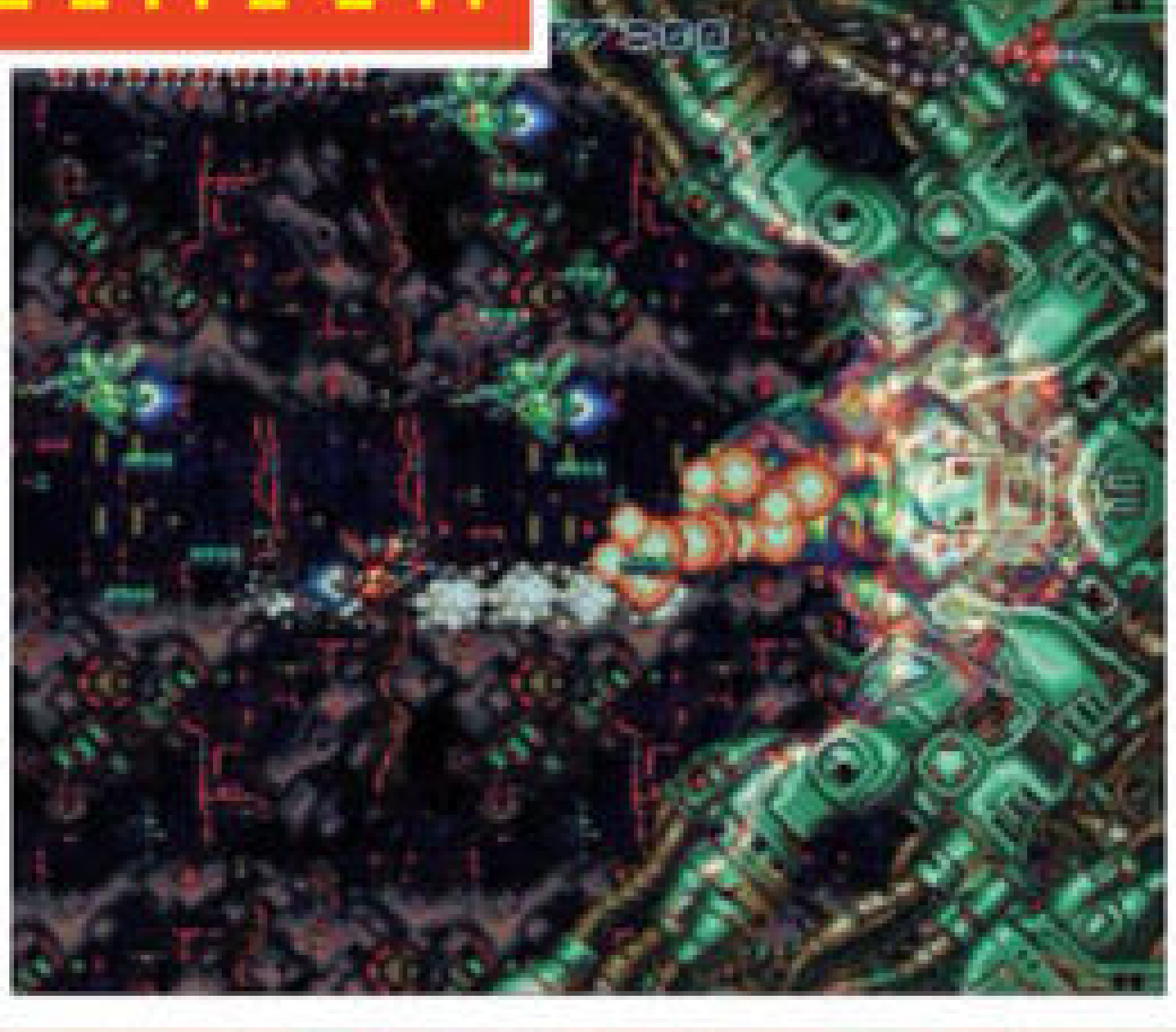
Wayler

Stage Five - Lava Planet

Transported from the soggy depths of the Cavern to the fiery wastes of the imaginatively named Lava Planet, your waterlogged space suit is likely to dry out quickly, but unfortunately you'll also have to face off against one of the game's most famous faces and the cover star of the Western version: Wayler. A massive cyborg capable of withstanding extreme temperatures and clad in molten lava, this brute is yet another example of the SNES's graphical muscle, showcasing smooth, multi-segmented animation and filling almost the entire screen. Like any other self-respecting fire robot, Wayler is fond of spewing flames from his mouth and flailing his enormous arms around like a child at a school disco, causing untold amounts of damage to any spaceship foolish enough to be in close proximity. Be sure to keep well away from those massive mitts of his and channel all of your energy into blasting away at his chest. Doing so reveals his weak spot – a green 'heart' – that, once destroyed, forces Wayler's lifeless body to sink beneath the red-hot planet surface, never to return.



Veinion



Stage Six - The Armada of Annihilation's Fortress

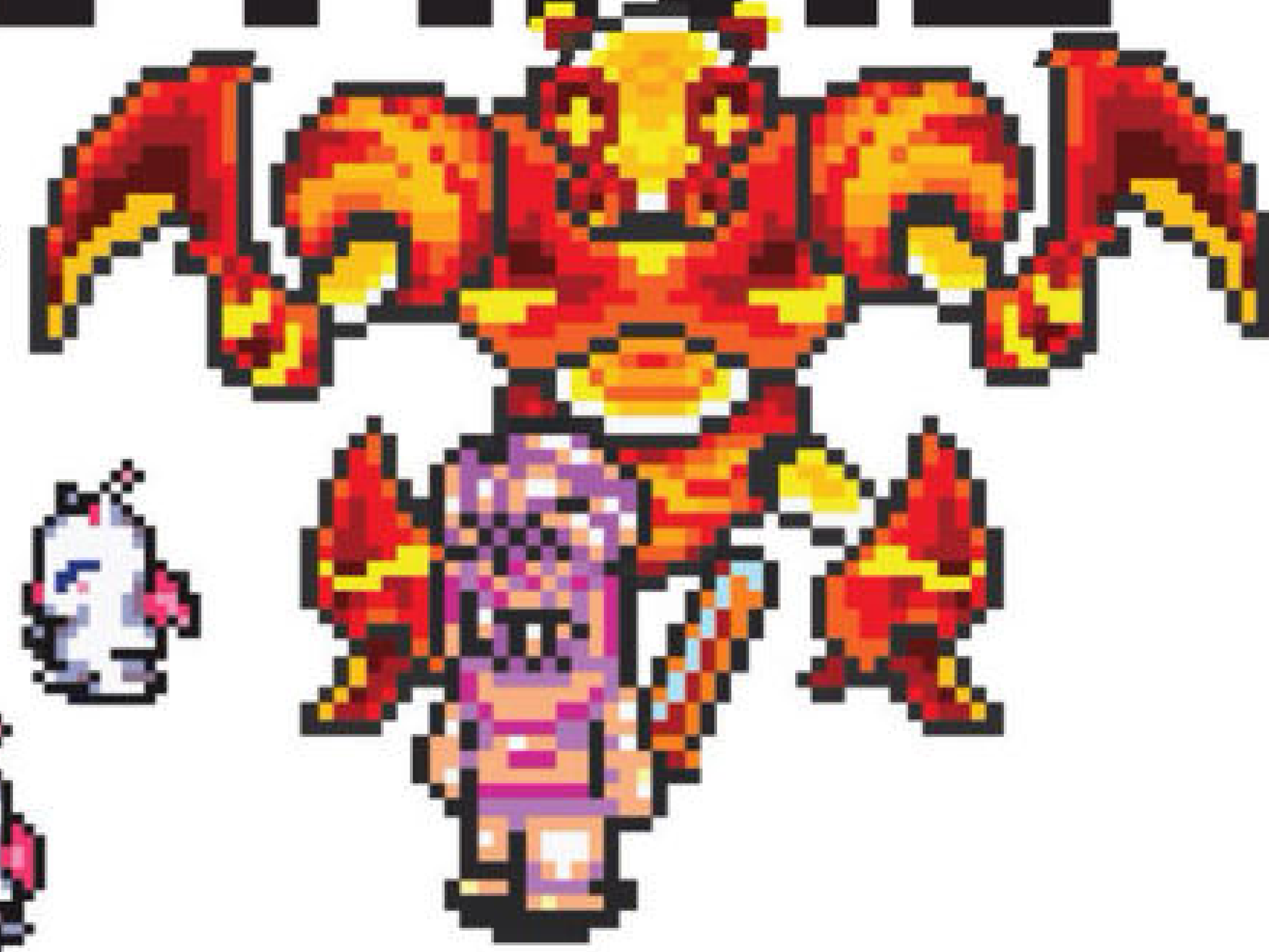
After fighting your way through the hostile alien fleet and infiltrating the enemy base, you're faced with the final challenge: Veinion, the evil leader of the Armada of Annihilation. At first glance he appears to be some kind of robotic overlord, but after ceaselessly blasting away for a while you'll uncover his true form: a horrific alien organism, which has the capability of copying your attacks. Your ship is scanned and Veinion proceeds to hurl clone Axelay craft in your direction. Needless to say, this is the hardest boss battle in the entire game and seems to last for an age. Even when you've finally destroyed Veinion and made good your escape from the rapidly disintegrating alien fortress, the battle is far from over – the enemy leader tries to prevent your getaway by filling the screen with shrapnel and blocking your progress. Land a few well-aimed missiles in his gullet and he vanishes into the ether, leaving the path open for you to return home to a rapturous reception and more canapés and fizzy drink than you can reasonably consume.

POWER
EJECT
RESET
Nintendo
SUPER NINTENDO
ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM
SUPER NINTENDO
ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM

RPG Heaven:

THE GREATEST SNES RPGS OF ALL TIME

During the infamous 16-bit console wars, both the Mega Drive and the Super Nintendo had their strengths that attracted gamers. One such strength of the Super Nintendo was the sheer amount of high-quality role-playing games available for it. Here we take a look at some of the best and most celebrated titles on Nintendo's machine



Terranigma

PUBLISHER: ENIX (JP) NINTENDO (PAL) **DEVELOPER:** QUINTET **YEAR** 1995

Terranigma is something of an oddity in the Super Nintendo RPG library. It was first released in 1995 in Japan under the title *Tenchi Sozo*, which translates as 'The Creation of Heaven and Earth'. A year later it was localised by Nintendo for the PAL markets but somehow never saw a release in America. This was extremely rare as most SNES RPGs made the trip to the US first and only a handful ever made it to PAL territories, a fact that explains why *Terranigma* now commands very high prices when bought online.

Terranigma is an action RPG that tells the story of Ark and his quest to resurrect life on Earth. It uses a top-down view and a fairly simple, but quite deep, real-time combat system. Ark has plenty of abilities such as dashing, jumping, sliding, guarding and an unusual magic system. For example, you must find Magirocks, which are taken to the magic shop to be turned into consumable spells. Once used, the spells turn back into Magirock and can be taken to the shop again. The game moves at quite a pace, even for an action-based RPG. Ark is instantly controllable and responds to commands on a whim, making him a joy to control.

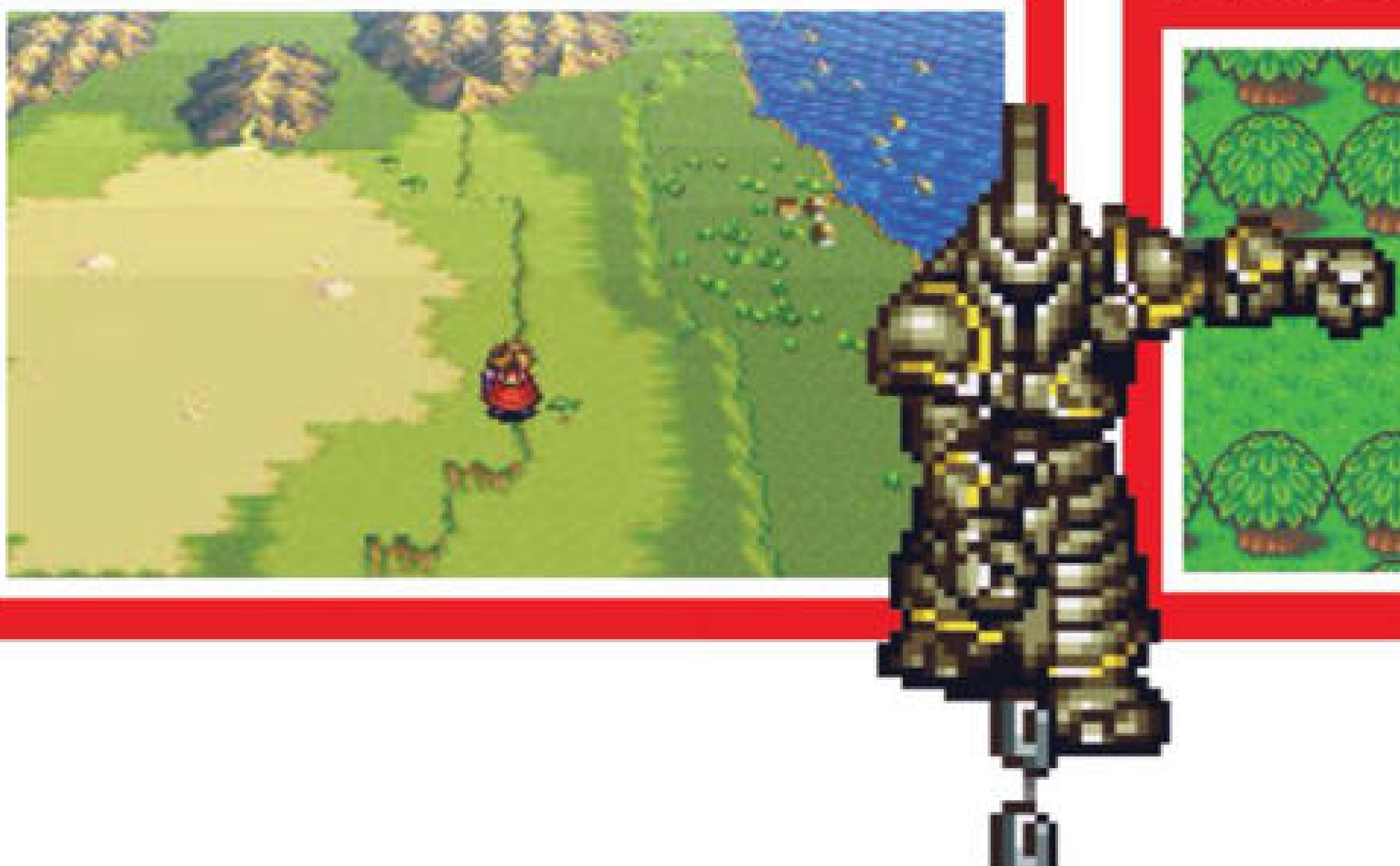
The meat of *Terranigma* involves the resurrection of Earth. Once you complete the first five towers at the start of the game, the continents of the world are restored and Ark travels to the mainland in order to kick-start life. Your first task is to revive the plant life to enable nature to begin its journey. Ark can converse with the plants and they will guide you to revive the animals and then eventually mankind. This is predominantly achieved by travelling to various parts of the world to complete dungeons, gain items and trigger the multitude of story events.

The reason *Terranigma* is so good, though, is down to expert execution of various elements by developers Quintet. It manages to tell a wonderfully moving story and mix in plenty of original elements within the genre. For example, once you revive mankind, you are tasked with building the economies of the continents by helping residents make discoveries and then introducing them to different cultures.

The plot is quite unique because you play a large portion of the game with no real enemy. Normally in RPGs there is a defining evil from the very beginning of the game, but not so with *Terranigma*, which unravels with a level of skill not seen in many console games of the time. It's filled with deception, regret, love, religion and science and told with excellent pacing.

Terranigma also features superb graphics that vary from dank, desolate landscapes to vibrant jungles. The animation is excellent, character designs are attractive and the boss fights are impressive. The music is also superb, one of the best soundtracks of the generation for sure.

We're praying the game gets a Virtual Console release so it can be enjoyed by those who missed it the first time around. This is probably the most anticipated game on the service now *Earthbound* has been released. *Terranigma* is an all-time classic that despite commanding high prices is worth a place in any SNES owner's collection.

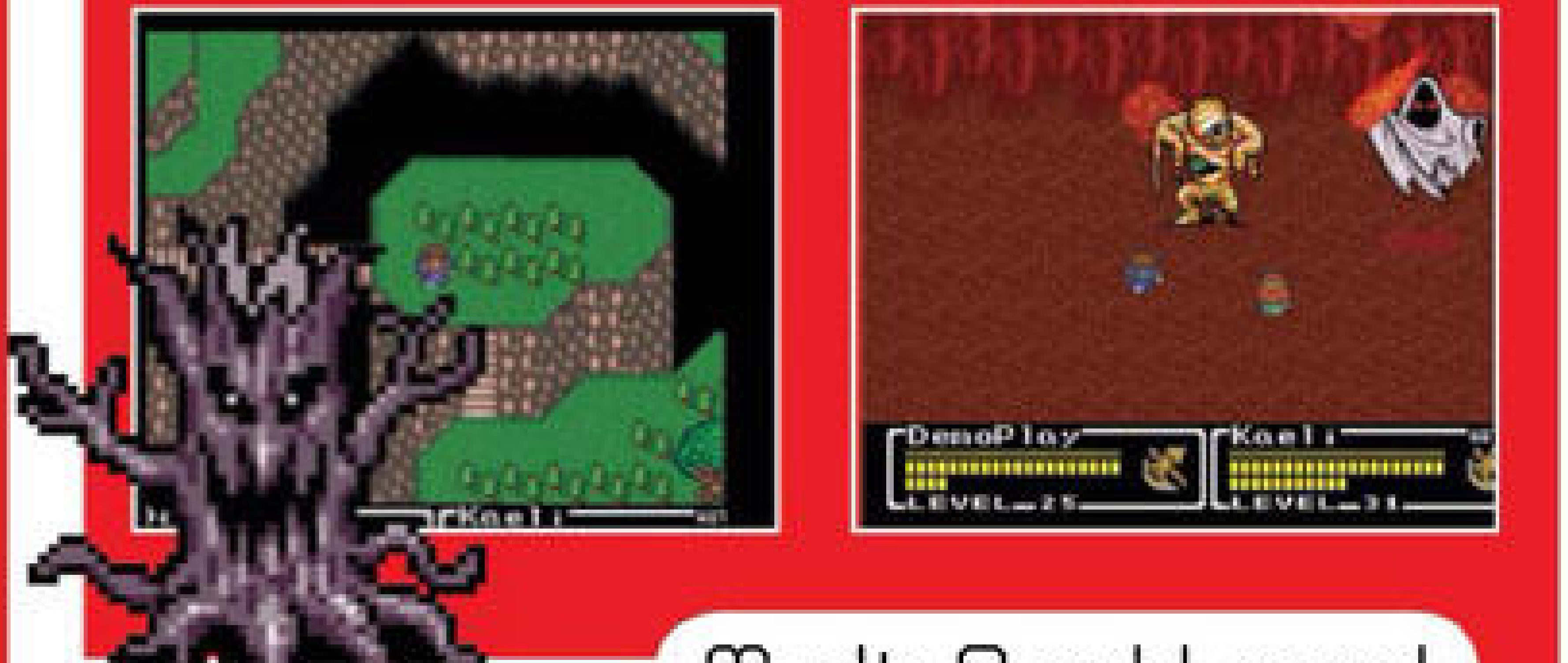


LEV 1 EXP 16 GEM 24
PLAYER
LEV 1 EXP 95 GEM
PLAYER

Soul Blazer

PUBLISHER: ENIX **DEVELOPER:** QUINTET **YEAR:** 1992

Seen as the first part of an unofficial trilogy that features both *Illusion of Time* and *Terranigma*, *Soul Blazer* is an action RPG based around the theme of resurrection. Essentially a dungeon-crawler, the player is tasked with freeing the souls of lost humans which, once released, rebuild the towns around them on your way to defeating the evil Deathtoll. The game tells a simple but poignant story that certainly has the power to draw the player in. Combat is also rather simple but somehow it all works like a dream because it's fast-paced, with plenty of enemies and some excellent boss battles. A forgotten gem you need to experience.



Mystic Quest Legend

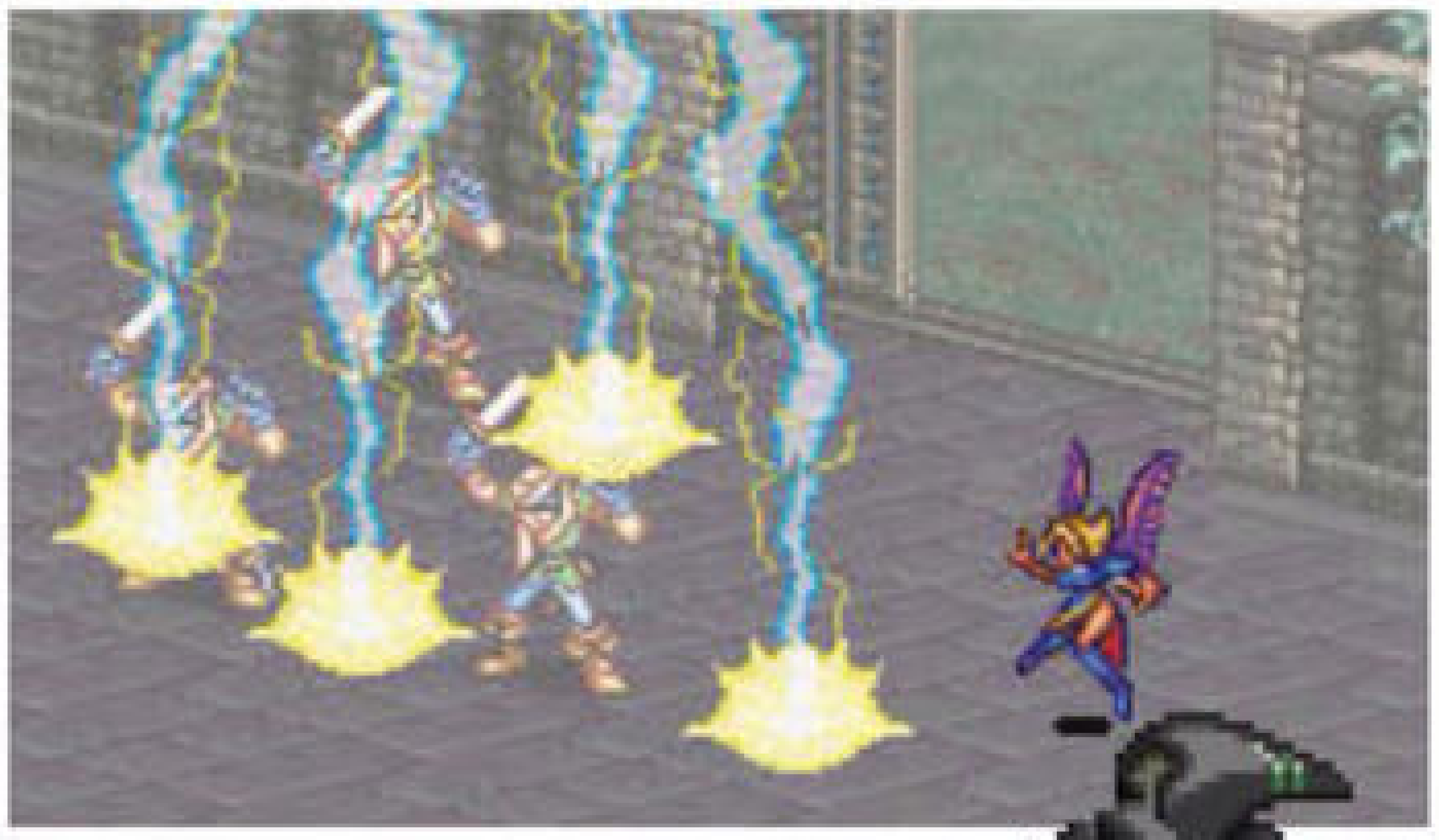
PUBLISHER: SQUARE (US/JP) NINTENDO (PAL) **DEVELOPER:** SQUARE **YEAR:** 1992

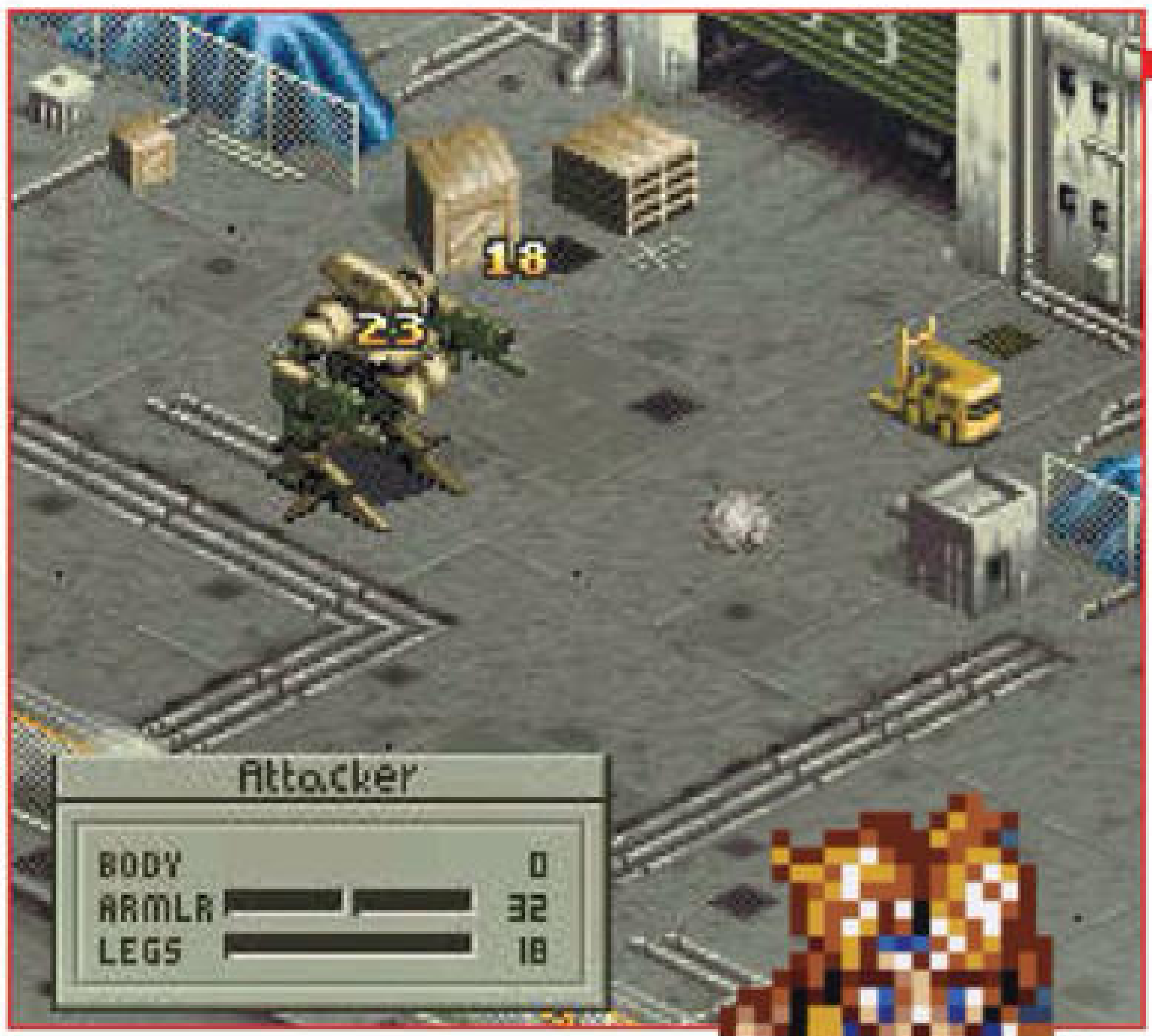
Developed by Square and aimed as an entry-level RPG, *Mystic Quest Legend* was notable for being the first *Final Fantasy*-themed game released in the PAL regions, although it was a spin-off rather than actual canon. Despite being dramatically cut down in the overall gameplay department, *Mystic Quest Legend* is absorbing and enjoyable mainly thanks to its fun battle system and some fantastic music. There are no random battles here, as enemies are onscreen and a battle starts when you touch them. The game is also littered with optional battle arenas for levelling. With plenty of items, weapons and enemies, it's a simple but enjoyable experience.

Breath of Fire II

PUBLISHER: CAPCOM (NA/JP) LAGUNA (EU) **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE **YEAR:** 1994

Superior in almost every way to its predecessor, Capcom's *Breath of Fire II* is another high-quality RPG for the Super Nintendo. The majority of the game is viewed from a traditional top-down perspective, but battles are viewed from a visually superb isometric viewpoint that features fantastic sprites and glorious special effects. Combat is turn-based and does feature random battles, but the pace of battles remains fast enough to avoid frustration. Centring around now series-staple characters Ryu and Nina, Ryu has the ability to transform into a dragon, which is one of the most interesting parts of the game. The recurring characters, much like *The Legend of Zelda's*, are descendants of previous characters and not the same ones. Despite a sluggish start and occasionally iffy translation, *Breath of Fire II* picks up pace to evolve into a truly great RPG.

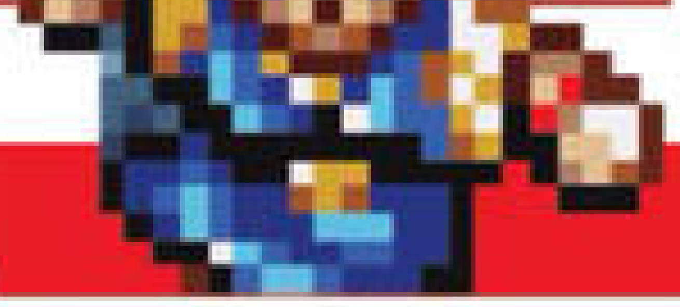




Front Mission

PUBLISHER: SQUARE **DEVELOPER:** G-CRAFT **YEAR:** 1995

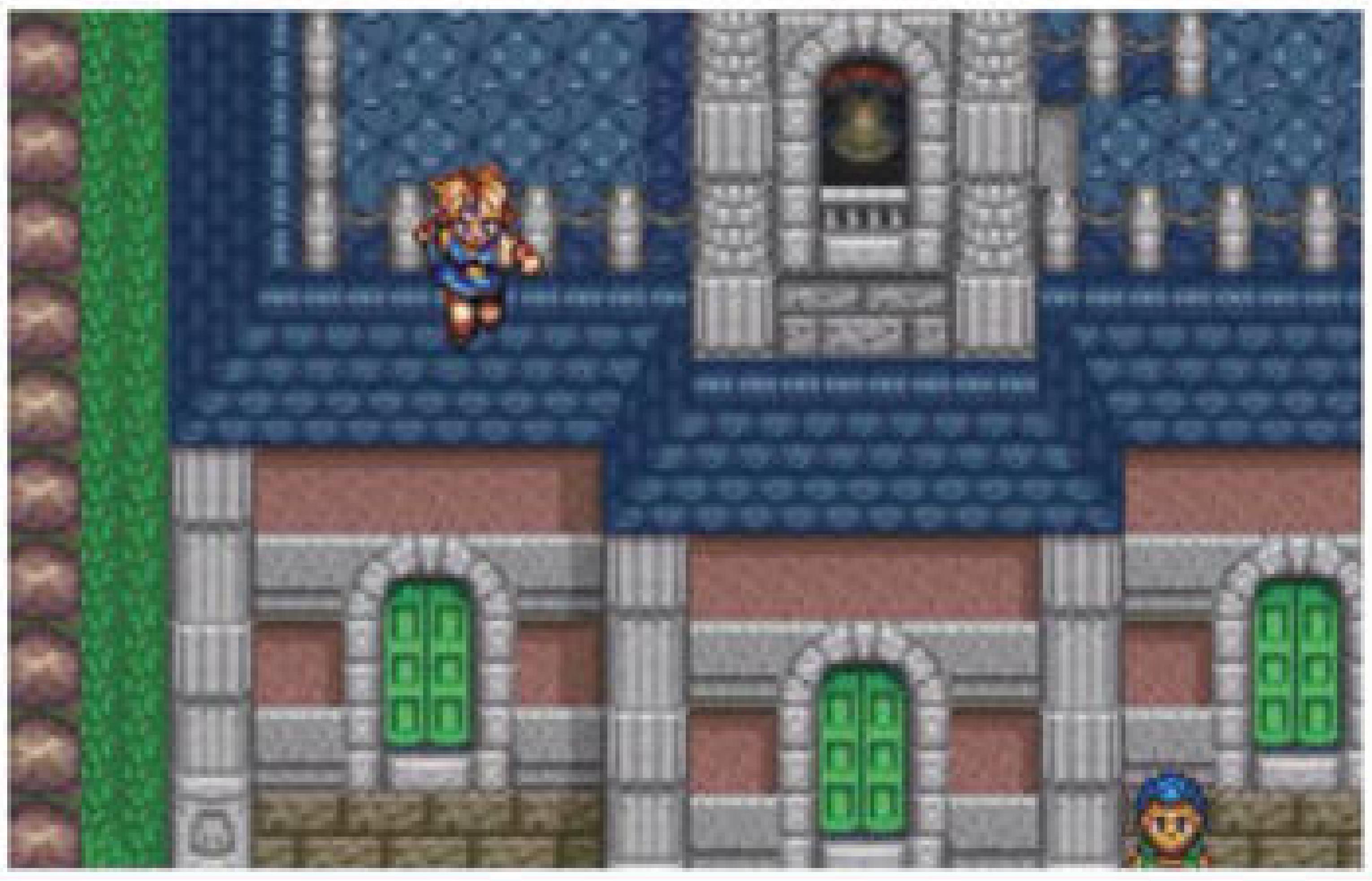
Released only in Japan in 1995, *Front Mission* still managed to gain a cult following in the West and was finally released in an officially translated form in North America during 2007 on Nintendo's DS. The game is an RPG of a tactical nature with linear game progression and a deep, entertaining plot. Set in 2090 and revolving around the colonisation of a fictitious island in the Pacific Ocean, *Front Mission* tells a tale that's as intriguing as it is fresh. The battle system is mostly in the usual tactical mould, however when attacks are performed, the game cuts to a close-up of the target in question for some spectacular visual effects. Depth comes from the customisation on offer. The majority of units are Wanzers, giant walking tanks that have four unique health bars: one each for the legs, left arm, right arm and body. Each is upgradable as the game progresses. It's different, but highly recommended.



Illusion of Time

PUBLISHER: ENIX (JP) NINTENDO (WORLD) **DEVELOPER:** QUINTET **YEAR** 1993

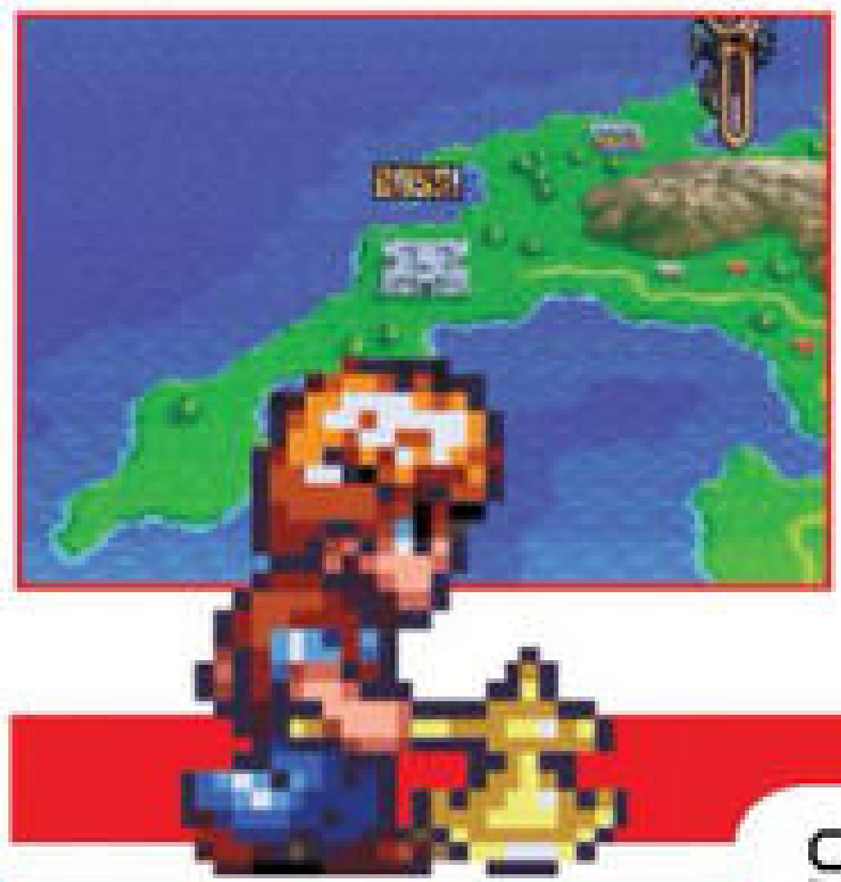
Despite being another action RPG, *Illusion of Time* is quite a different beast to many similar games. Eschewing many staples of the genre, such as experience points, currency or equipment, *Illusion of Time* centres around Will and his alter egos in a plot to uncover the secrets of the Tower of Babel. Like *Terranigma*, the world is based loosely on Earth and features many locations such as The Great Wall of China and the Egyptian Pyramids. After adventuring to the Tower of Babel with his father, disaster strikes and Will returns to the village alone with no recollections of what happened. The game begins in earnest when Will gains the ability to make his first of two transformations. Will does have the ability to increase his power by collecting jewels dropped when clearing a room of enemies, but this unique skill can only be done once per room. It all makes for a highly novel adventure.

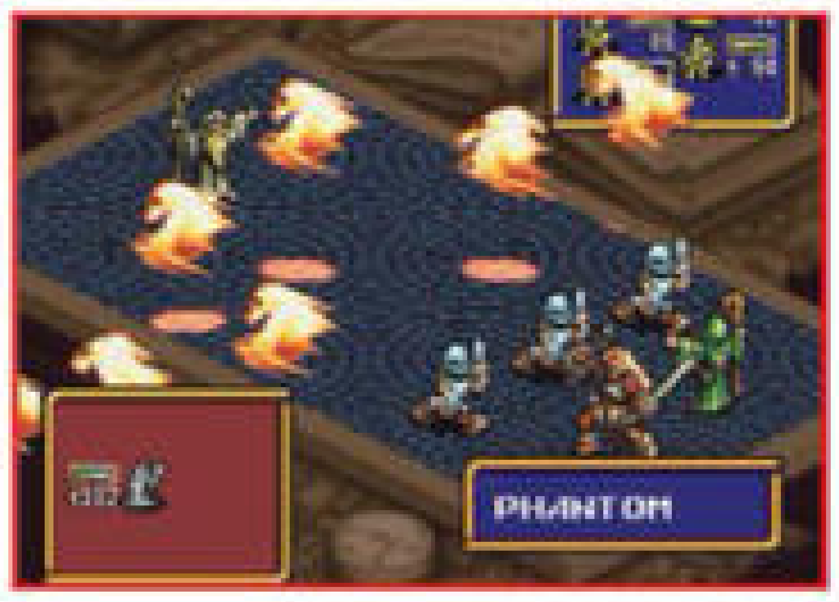


Ogre Battle

PUBLISHER: ENIX **DEVELOPER:** QUEST **YEAR:** 1995

One of the most important things about *Ogre Battle* is that it launched one of the most successful careers in Japan, namely Yasumi Matsuno, who went on to create several mega hits, two of which scored 40/40 in *Famitsu*. The other most important thing is that it's also an excellent strategy RPG, although it plays out more like an RTS title, such as *Command & Conquer*, upon entering battle. *Ogre Battle* has plenty of depth when preparing for combat. It features a tarot card system that can be used to add certain effects at certain times. There's an alignment system that's a play on the good/evil theme, a day/night cycle that affects how certain classes or cards react in fights and more than 70 different classes of units to control. Set to a gripping, politically motivated plot and boasting some lovely visuals, *Ogre Battle* comes highly recommended to those that like a good challenge.



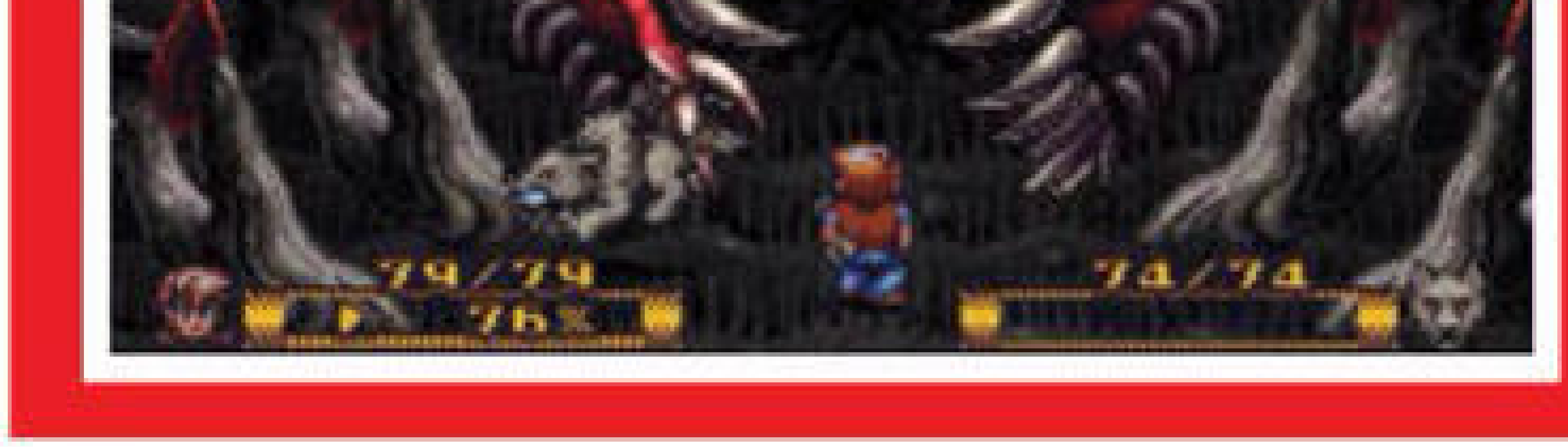


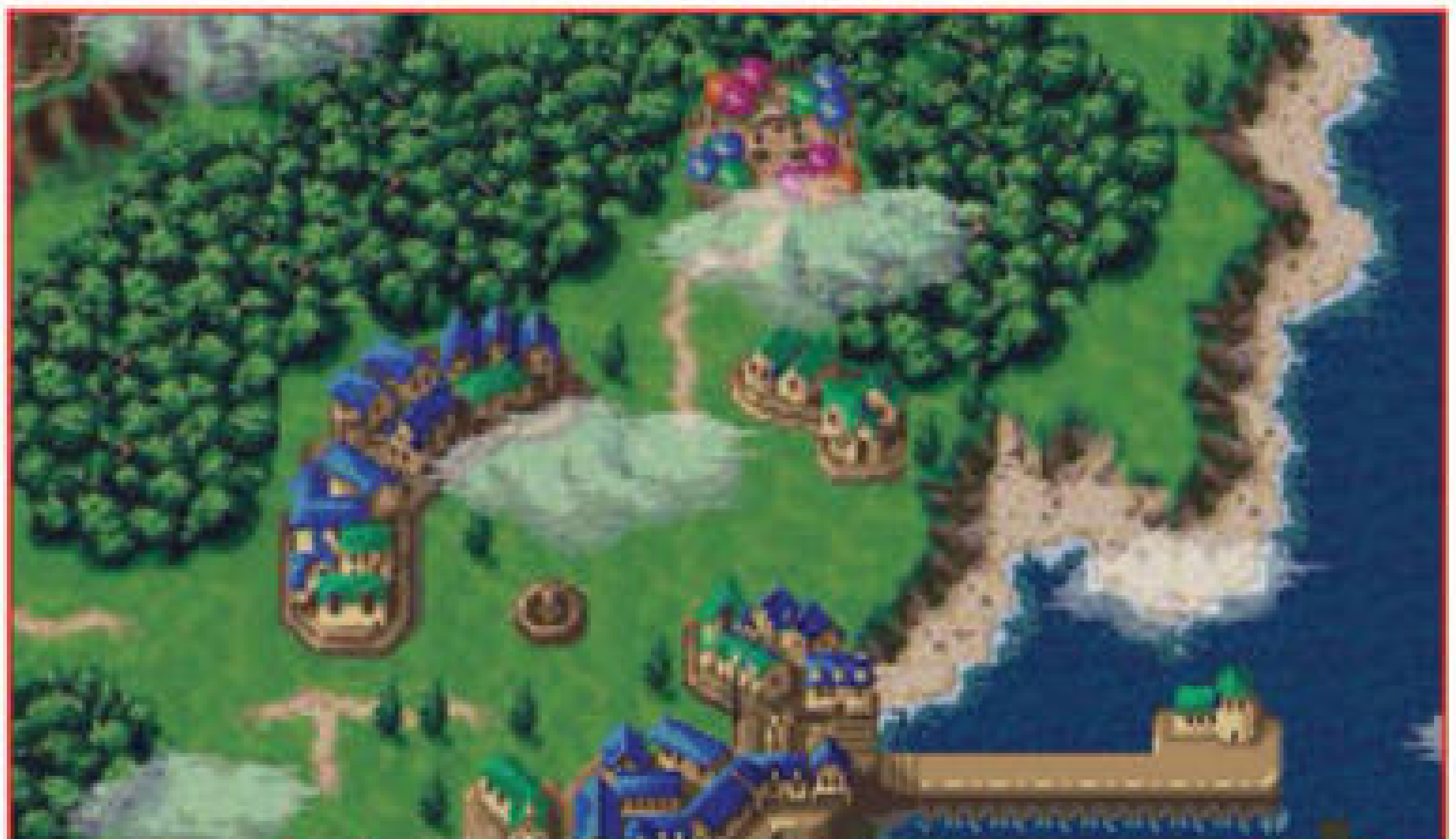
Secret of Evermore

PUBLISHER: SQUARE **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE **YEAR:** 1995

In 1995, Super Nintendo fans were hugely anticipating *Secret of Mana 2*. Instead they got *Secret of Evermore*, a game developed by a team in America that Square had set up solely for creating it.

After the initial disappointment that *Mana 2* was not coming, *Secret of Evermore* turned out to be an excellent take on the *Mana* gameplay system, but with a contemporary setting in America. The plot is based around time travel and involves an unnamed boy and his dog while featuring plenty of clever B-movie references. What we love about *Secret of Evermore* is that it is packed with interesting ideas. Each region has a different currency, which can be converted at certain vendors and as you travel to each time zone, your dog takes on a different form relevant to that zone. Magic is based around alchemy, so you have to create your spells before you can cast them. The dog can also be used to sniff out ingredients for you, delivering another nice touch in a game that's littered with them.





Chrono Trigger

PUBLISHER: SQUARESOFT **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE **YEAR:** 1995

This epic RPG was developed by Squaresoft and featured a creative team that had fans of the genre salivating. Hironobu Sakaguchi, the creator of *Final Fantasy*; Yuji Horii, creator of long-term rival Enix's *Dragon Quest*; and Akira Toriyama, artist of *Dragon Ball Z* and *Dragon Quest*, were all lead designers on the project. This led to *Chrono Trigger* being massively anticipated by Japanese and Western RPG fans alike. We're pleased to say this masterpiece delivered on all counts.

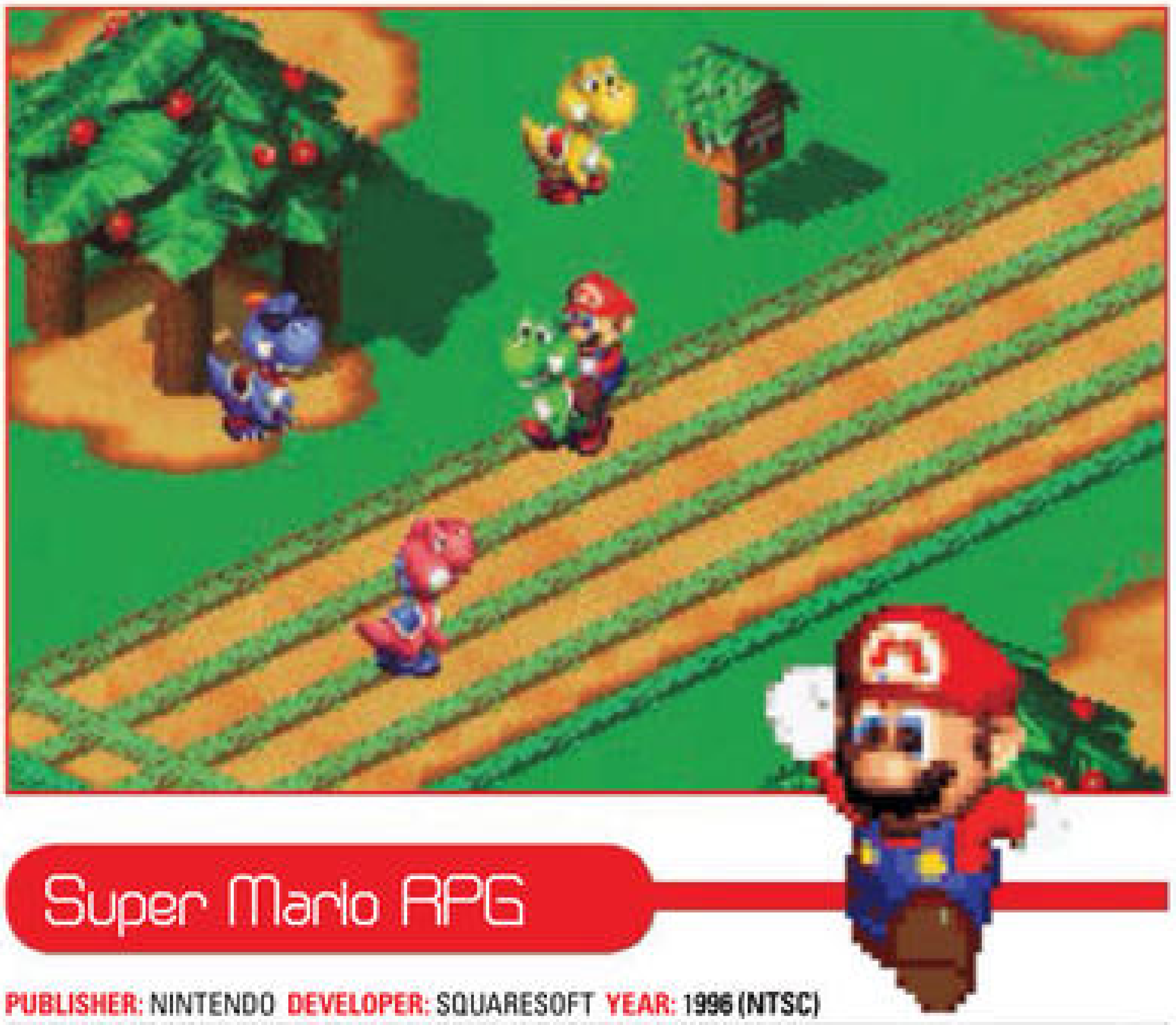
The first thing you notice about the game is the very *Dragon Ball Z*-style art. It's striking compared to the sombre styling of *Final Fantasy VI*. Characters have wild spiky hair, colours are vivid but retain a realistic style that sits somewhere between other popular Squaresoft games.

On the surface, *Chrono Trigger* seems like any other Japanese RPG, however it contains several important innovations that set it apart from them. The first of these is the complete elimination of random battles and the separate battle plain. Enemies are visible at all times, so once you come into contact with one the battle begins and plays out on the same screen, rather than cutting to a battle map. This helps to not only avoid the frustration of random encounters, but also allows the level of immersion into the world to remain high without the jarring change of scenery.

The next major innovation is its many multiple endings. *Chrono Trigger* features no fewer than 14 different endings to discover, many of them accessible through the excellent new Game Plus feature that's now standard on many of today's games.

Throughout the game, lead character Crono travels across various time zones ranging from 65000000BC to 2300AD. This gave the developers a real freedom to create very diverse and interesting locations, ranging from the dinosaur-infested forests of the past to the malfunctioning domes of the future. The story itself is excellent with intriguing enemies, genuine heart-felt moments and a great translation that still stands up today.

Chrono Trigger is a masterpiece of game design and it hasn't aged at all since it was first released in 1995. Anyone with even a passing interest in the genre should check it out immediately. Just be aware that it's a little on the pricey side.



Super Mario RPG

PUBLISHER: NINTENDO **DEVELOPER:** SQUARESOFT **YEAR:** 1996 (NTSC)

Super Mario RPG is a landmark title in many different ways. On the one hand it was a stunning collaboration between Nintendo and Square, but on the other it was one of the last Square-developed titles on a Nintendo platform for some time.

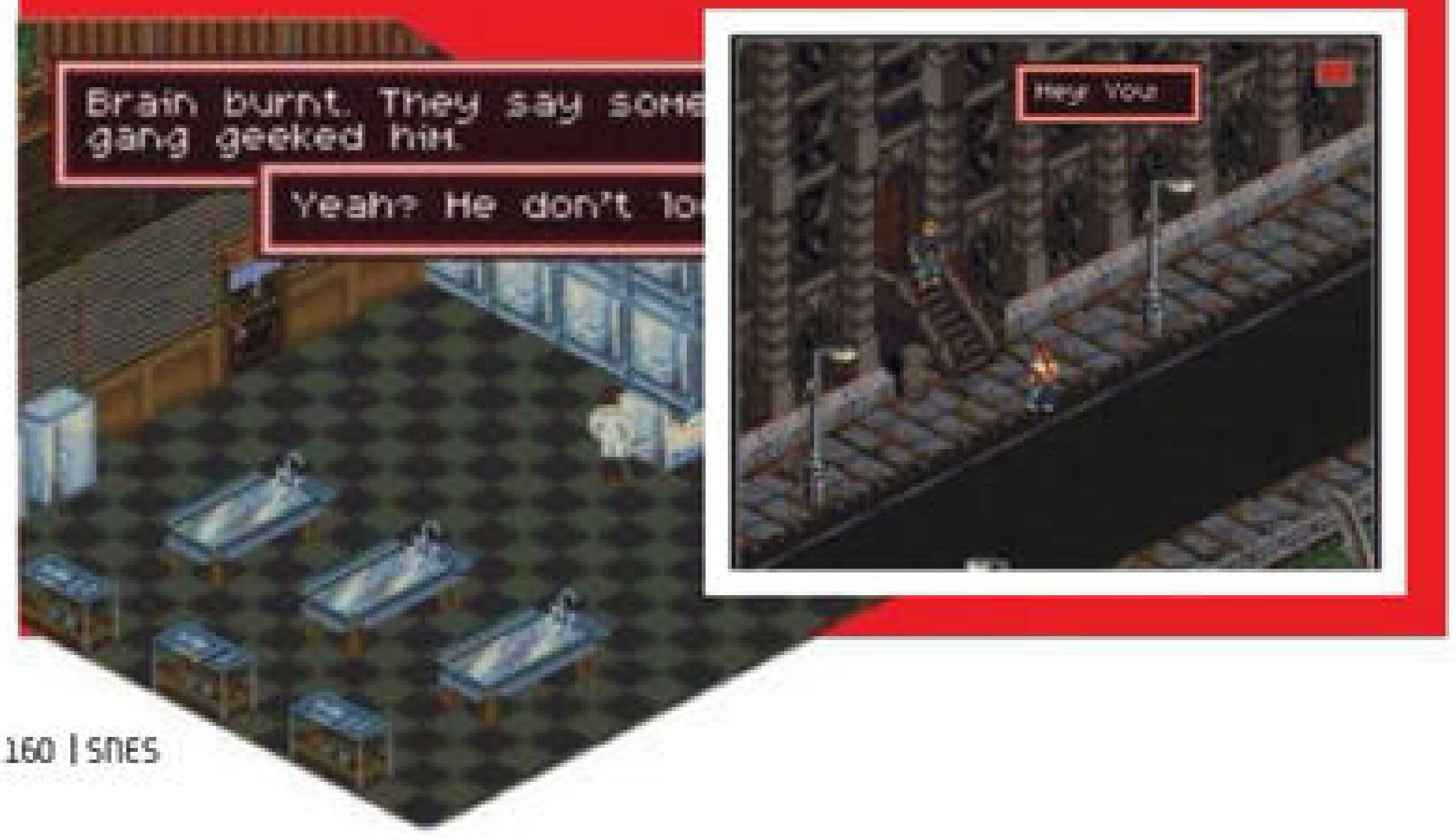
The first thing new players should do when starting the game is to watch the brilliant Attract mode. This gives players a great idea of the sheer amount of superb ideas that have been crammed into it. Featuring a mix of action platforming and turn-based combat, *Super Mario RPG* is a fast-paced, absorbing adventure, which is incredibly accessible to even the most novice of RPG fans. Visually the game looks 32-bit, as it features similar rendering techniques to *Donkey Kong Country* and a distinctive 3D isometric viewpoint. The music is suitably twee but never annoying as expected from now industry legend, Yoko Shimomura.

If there is one thing that *Super Mario RPG* does so well, it's that it highlights Squaresoft in its prime and how big a deal it was when Nintendo finally lost the talented developer to Sony.

Shadowrun

PUBLISHER: DATA EAST/LASER BEAM **DEVELOPER:** BEAM SOFTWARE **YEAR:** 1993

One of the most unique titles on the SNES, *Shadowrun* combines action RPG-style gameplay with elements of the point-and-click genre that was popular on computers at the time. Set in the not-too-distant future, your task as Jake Armitage is to track down your missing identity and to find the person that wants you dead. The cyberpunk setting feels very fresh on the console, the isometric visual style is nicely detailed, while the music is suitably matched and well composed. Piecing together the plot is a hugely compelling experience, while talking to NPCs opens up new conversational opportunities to help you through this more adult of Super Nintendo RPGs.



Brain burnt. They say some
gang geeked him.

Yeah? He don't lo

Hey! You!

Secret of Mana

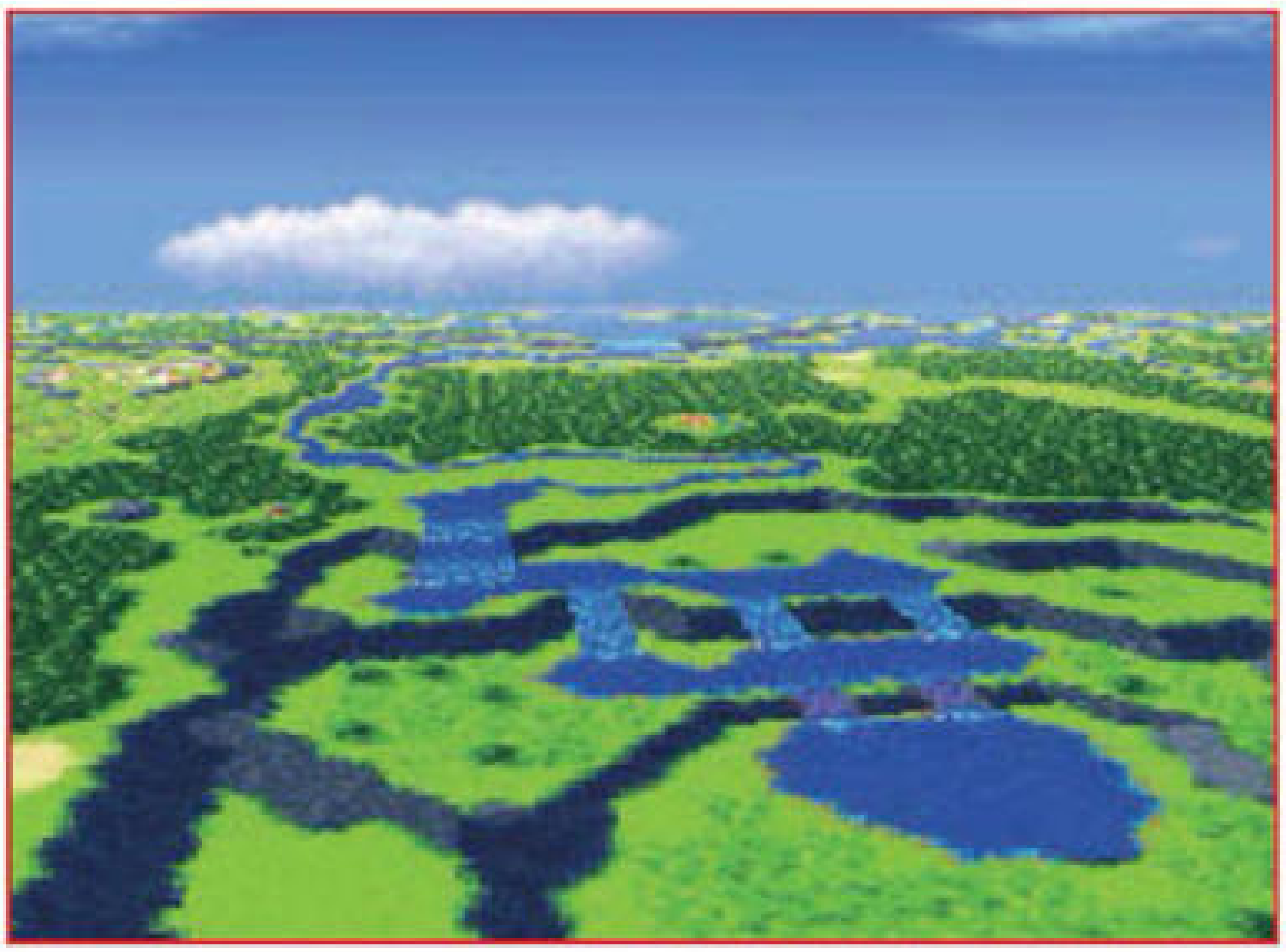
PUBLISHER: SQUARESOFT **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE **YEAR:** 1993

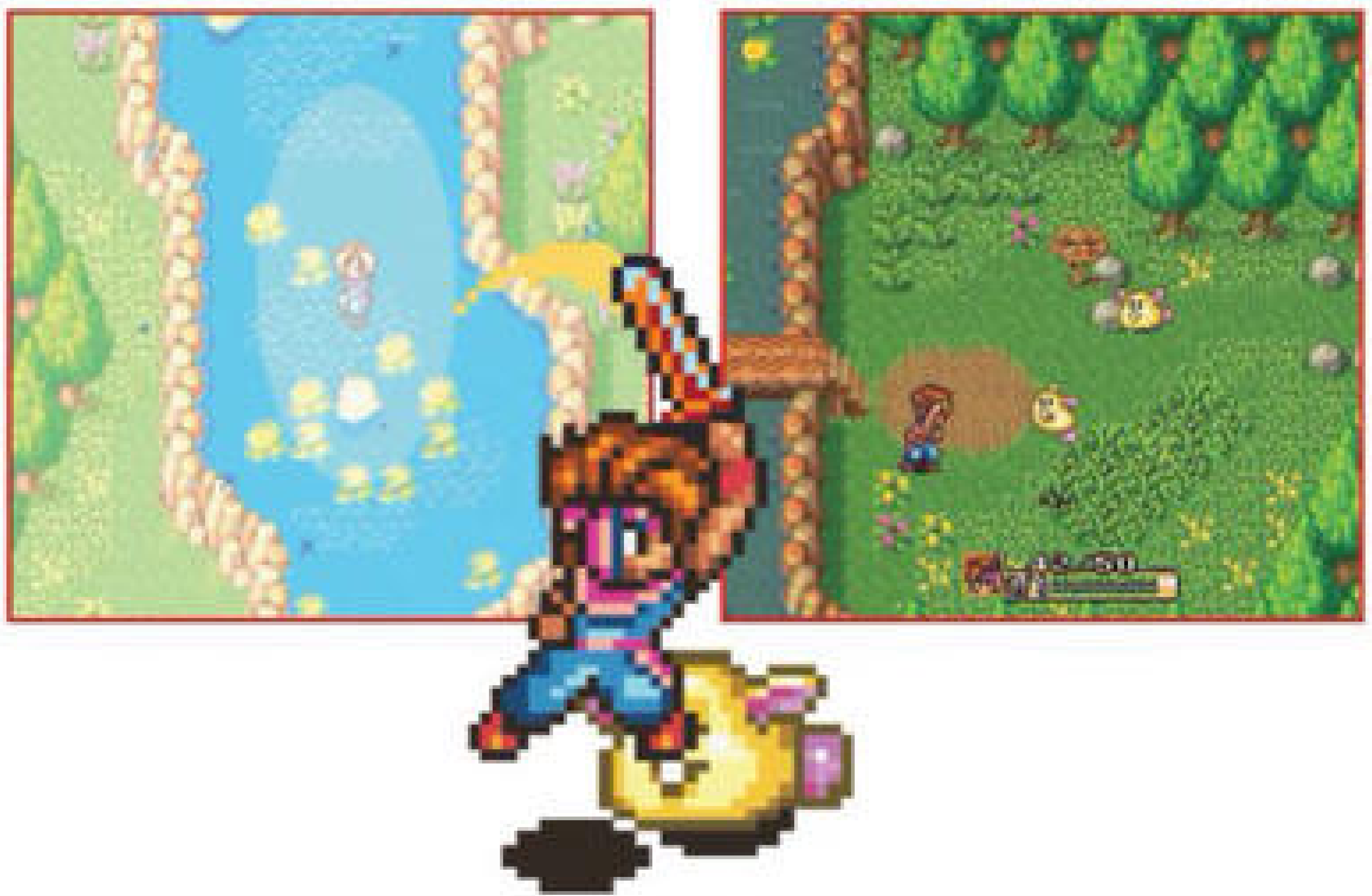
Secret of Mana is a hugely popular action RPG and for good reason. Squaresoft's game features sumptuous graphics, incredible music and a stunning three-player mode that instantly made it stand apart from other RPGs of the time.

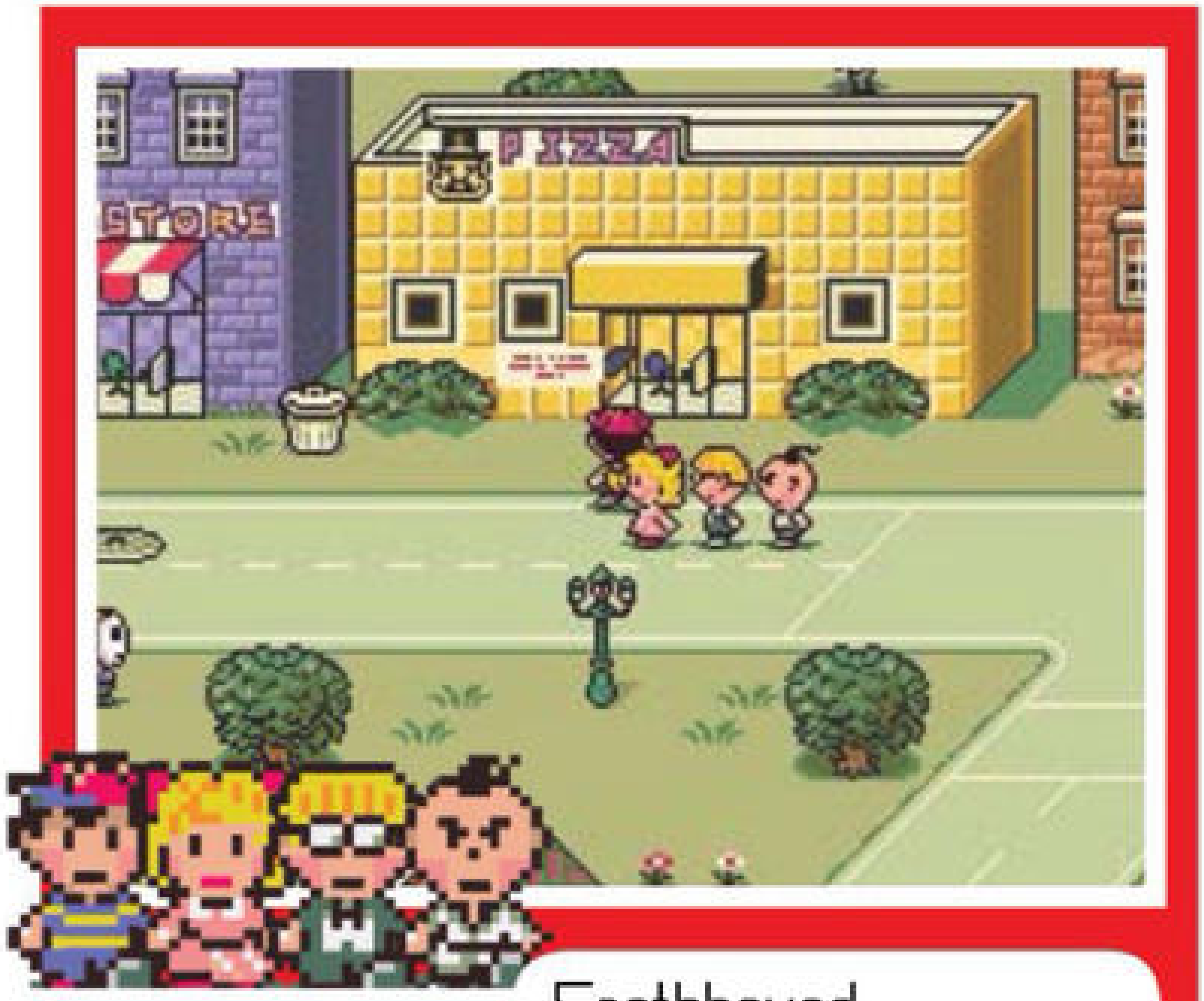
First released in 1993 and a follow up to the Game Boy classic *Mystic Quest*, *Secret of Mana* captivated audiences from the get go. It tells a simple story of a young boy who discovers a mysterious sword that he pulls, Arthur-like, from solid stone. It turns out that Mana, the lifeblood of the land, is being drained by the enemy in order to control the world; leaving the hero to energise the failing Mana Sword and hopefully restore balance to the land.

Visually, *Secret of Mana* is stunning, with some of the best visuals to be seen on a 16-bit system at the time. Locations are diverse, ranging from desert plateaus, bustling villages and evergreen forests, with Upperland being a standout location, as you literally walk through the forest as the seasons change from one to the next. Sonically the game doesn't disappoint either. The music in the opening sequence is still one of the most stunning in gaming, even today. Using sampled pipes, bass and various synthesised sounds among others, *Secret of Mana*'s soundtrack is diverse, often beautiful, yet dark and dramatic when it needs to be.

At its core, it's an action RPG featuring character levels, weapon levels and magic levels. Eight weapons are available to the player, which can be upgraded throughout the adventure. Magic too comes in eight forms and covers a variety of traditional elements. The biggest aspect of the game, however, is that it can be played by up to three players using a multi-tap. This is something that has rarely been done since, which is disappointing, as it completely takes a usually solitary experience and livens it up immensely. On the downside, when in single player the AI can cause a few minor issues, although its behaviour can be adjusted. Ultimately though, *Secret of Mana* is another classic RPG for Nintendo's 16-bit console.







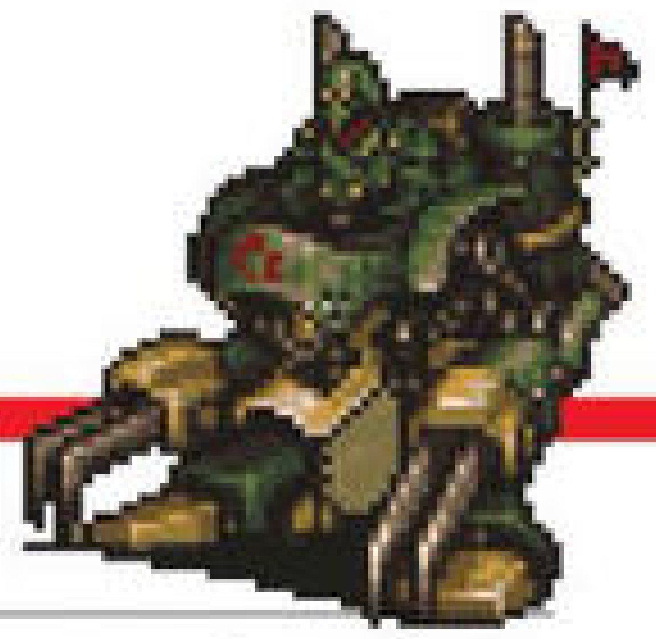
Earthbound

PUBLISHER: NINTENDO **DEVELOPER:** HAL/APE **RELEASE:** 1994

Earthbound is certainly one of the most interesting titles for the Super Nintendo. On the surface it appears to be fairly simplistic, but the more time spent with it, the more you realise just how unique it actually is. In fact, there's nothing else quite like it on any 16-bit console.

Set in modern-day America, *Earthbound* is a Japanese take on the American lifestyle with often-hilarious results. It tells the story of Ness and his friends and their adventure to defeat the evil Giygas, the leader of an alien invasion on planet Earth.

The graphics have a simple but extremely charming style to them, coming across like a cute Saturday morning cartoon. The world itself is presented in a pseudo-3D style and is completely seamless from one location to the next – very uncommon within the actual genre. The fighting system is generally standard, but the actions of characters during fights will leave players grinning from ear to ear, as they're so entertaining. Despite a fairly slow pace, *Earthbound* is an incredibly charming and wacky game that deserves to be played through. It's now available on Virtual Console, meaning you'll no longer have to shell out over £500 for the original game.



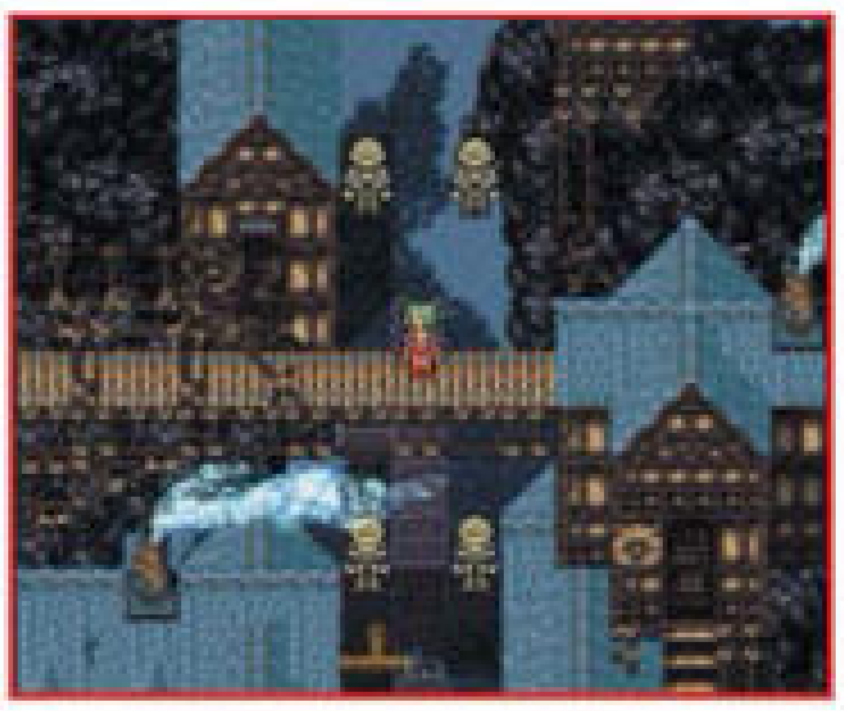
Final Fantasy VI

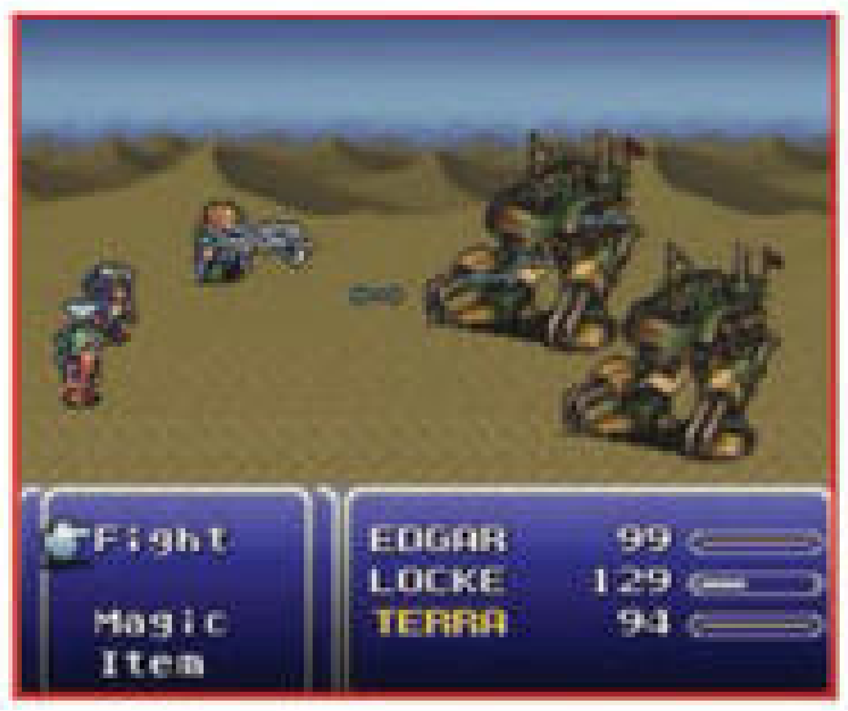
PUBLISHER: SQUARESOFT **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE **RELEASE:** 1994

Leading up to the release of *Final Fantasy VI*, Squaresoft was building a massive reputation in the RPG scene. Enix, developer of *Dragon Quest*, was the most popular in Japan at the time, but *Final Fantasy VI* certainly marked a shift in Square's favour. It was simply an astonishing package, which was wonderfully ambitious with its storytelling and dark themes. Couple this with glorious visuals and a critically acclaimed soundtrack and it's no wonder *Final Fantasy VI* is often heralded as the best game in the series by American and Japanese audiences.

The plot is quite dark and at times even depressing, as you work your way through the many areas of the game, meeting hundreds of interesting characters along the way. The central character of the story is a young girl called Terra. When you first meet her she has been brainwashed by the evil empire and is being controlled in order to attack Espers (magical beings) and wipe them out. Once free of the empire, Terra goes on a journey of discovery to find out where she is from and rediscover her forgotten memories. Along the way some absolutely magnificent characters are met: Shadow the ninja with his trusty canine sidekick Interceptor; Edgar the King Of Figaro, who has an eye for the ladies; Ultros who is apparently octopus royalty; and Kefka, the antagonist of the game and none other than a court jester! Kefka aims to defeat the Espers to take control of the magic and indeed the world. It's the duty of the player to stop him. Along the way, themes of love, regret, isolation, desperation and many others are carefully explored. Squaresoft did an excellent job with such a deep plot and it still impresses today.

Plot aside, *Final Fantasy VI* plays out much like traditional Japanese RPG with active turn-based combat and plenty of random battles. With 14 playable characters and masses of customisation, it's an all-time classic that is climbing in price and desirability.



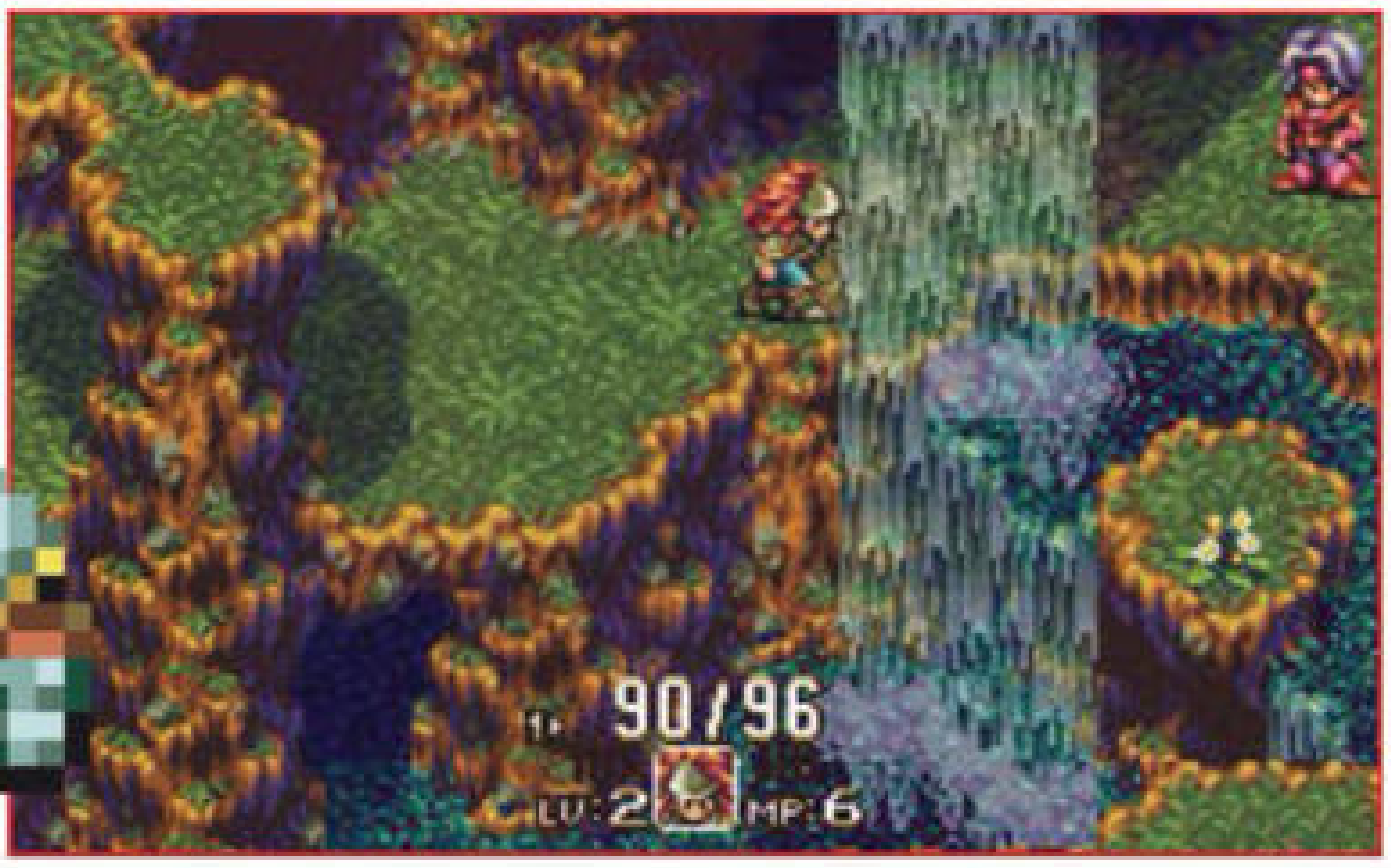


Seiken Densetsu 3

PUBLISHER: SQUARESOFT **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE **YEAR:** 1995

Despite never being released outside of Japan, *Seiken Densetsu 3* has built up a huge following over the years, with many fans that are still desperate for an official translation. There are many reasons for this, but the most obvious are its graphics, which are achingly beautiful and easily sit alongside some of the best 32-bit 2D RPGs.

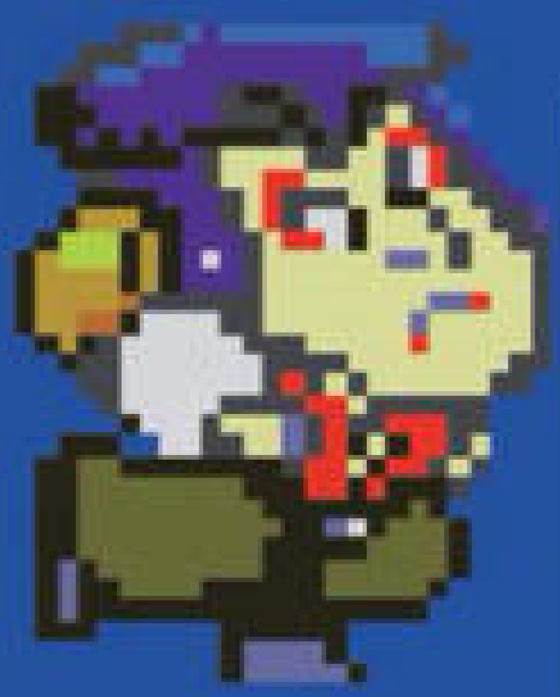
Like its predecessor, *Secret of Mana*, *Seiken Densetsu 3* is an action RPG with deep combat and a multiplayer option, although it only supports two players. It's packed with many unique features, however, including a branching story arc, absolutely huge bosses and a day-and-night cycle with each day based on an element that affects magic as a result. *Seiken Densetsu 3* never made it to the West because of a few technical problems in the game's code, but it has been translated by fans and is fully playable in English, although sourcing a Japanese copy is still worth doing.



THE LEGEND OF THE MYSTICAL NINJA

With its lush visuals, buckets of charm, humour, wonderful music, and world that meshed elements from platform, puzzle, shmup and RPG games, the West's first entry in the *Mystical Ninja* (aka *Ganbare Goemon*) series of games is one of the craziest platform games to appear on the Super Nintendo. Stuart Hunt puffs on his smoking pipe and inhales the madness of *The Legend Of The Mystical Ninja*.

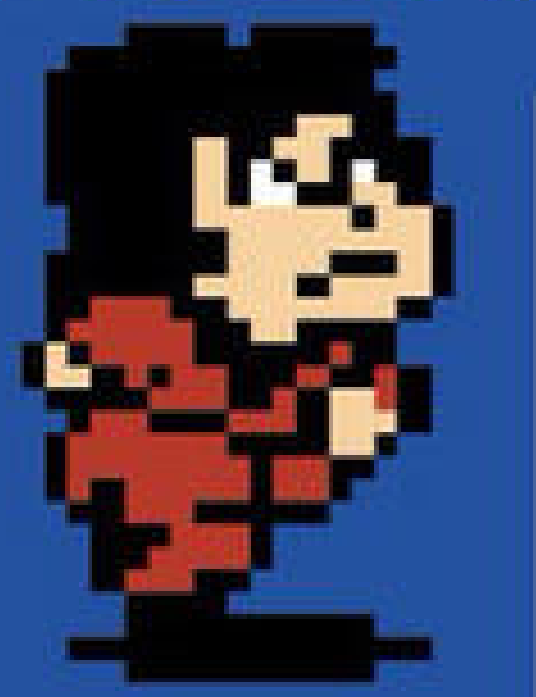
THE EVOLUTION OF GOEMON



MR GOEMON

Arcade, 1986

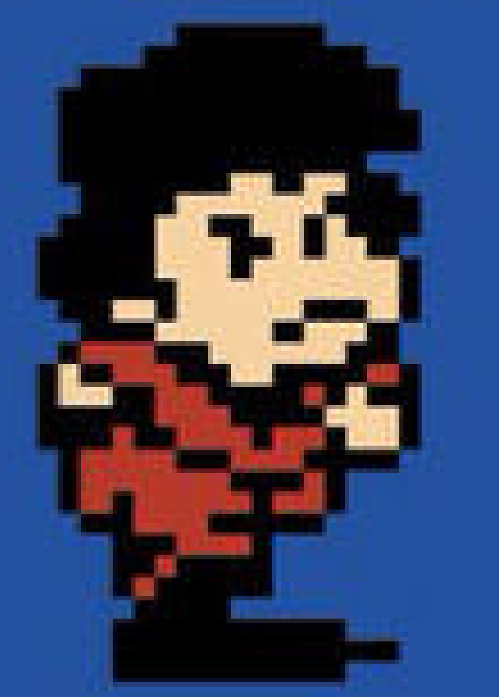
For his arcade debut, originally Goemon's look took cues from traditional Ukiyo-e paintings. The game was a quirky side-scrolling run-and-jump game that played similarly to the platform sections in *The Legend Of The Mystical Ninja*.



GANBARE GOEMON

Famicom, 1986

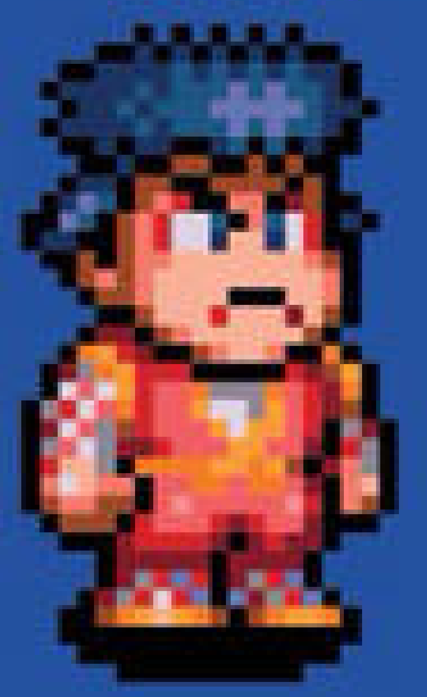
For Goemon's first console release, the Ukiyo-e look was dropped – though not in the game's box art – in favour of a more anime-looking cartoon sprite. We think the white parts in his eyes make him look a little angry, though.



GANBARE GOEMON 2

Famicom, 1989

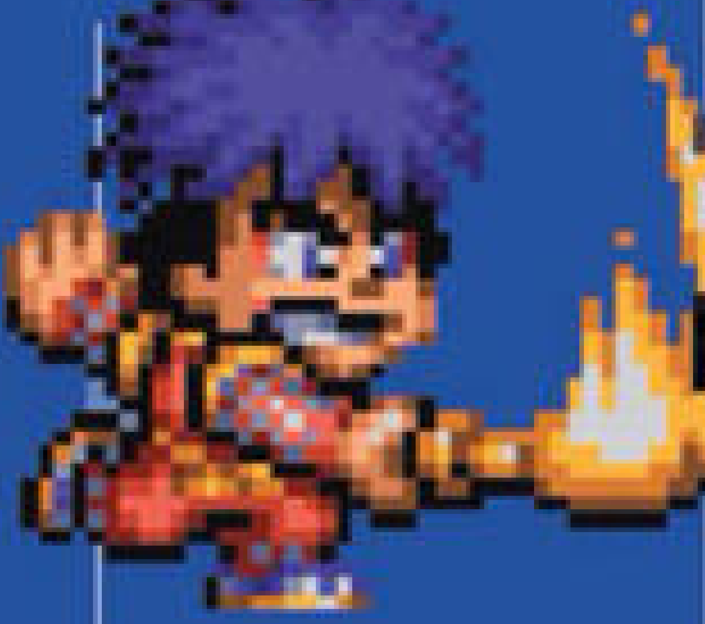
The Famicom sequel, which was the first to introduce the co-op mode and Ebisumaru, opted to make Goemon look like a character in the comic strip *Peanuts*, with a change of hairstyle that he would keep in subsequent exploits.



LEGEND OF THE MYSTICAL NINJA

SNES, 1991

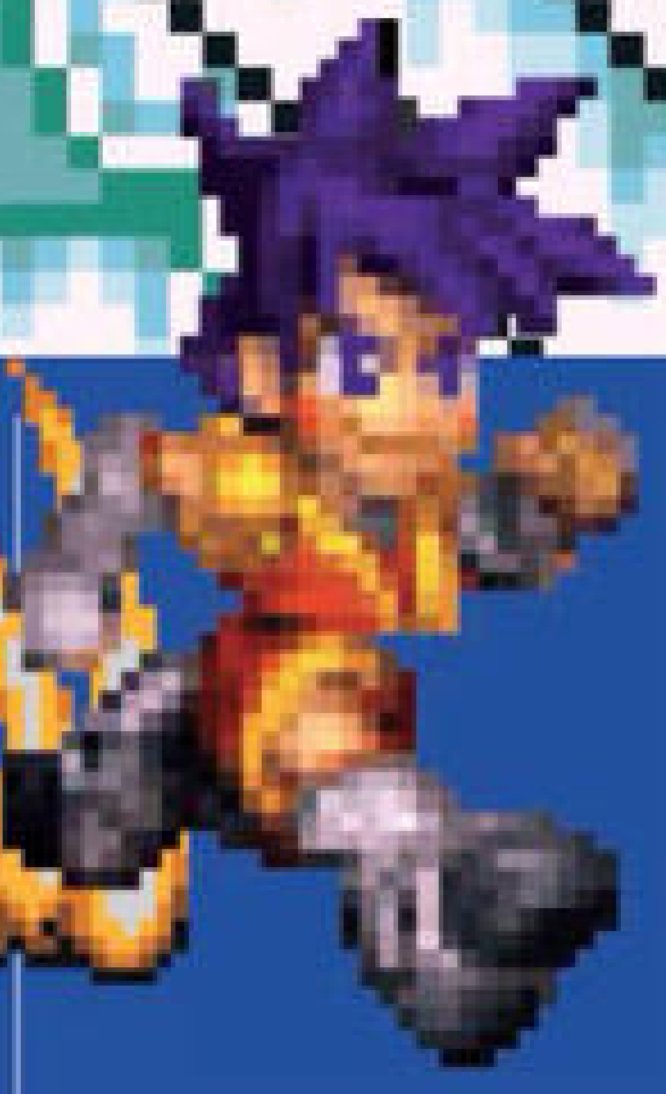
The added muscle of the Super Nintendo allowed Konami to breathe more personality into the character. This the first incarnation of Goemon with his blue-tinted hair and red and yellow outfit.



GANBARE GOEMON 2

SNES, 1993

The Goemon sprite in the SNES follow-up to the original didn't really deviate much from the original. The only notable difference is that the sprite looks more detailed, slightly chunkier and has spikier hair.

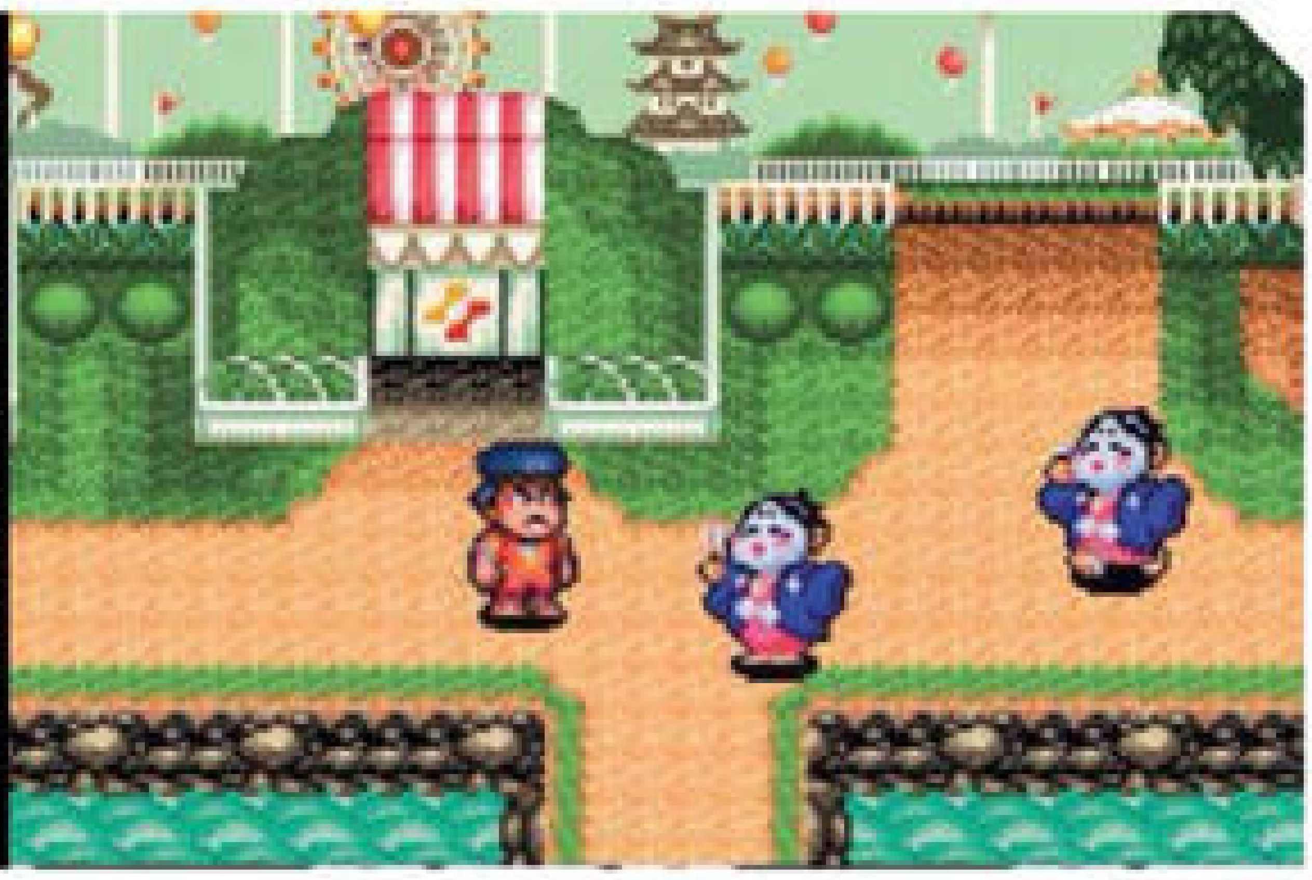


GANBARE GOEMON: SHIN SEDAI SHUUMEI

PlayStation, 2001

A series reboot of sorts, this PlayStation game reimagined the *Goemon* world by setting it in the future and going all *Dragon Ball* in the looks department.

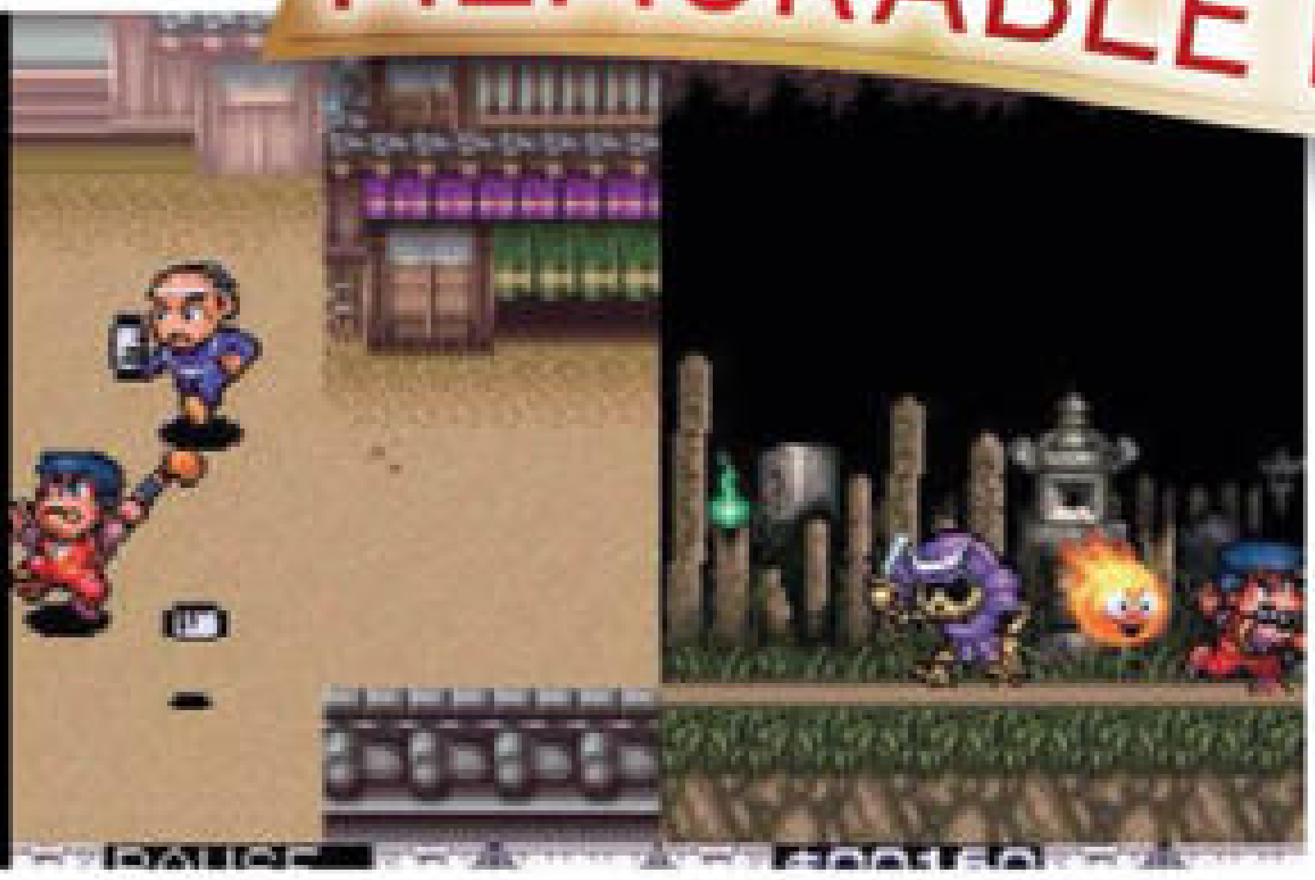
WHY IS IT A CLASSIC?



It has something for everyone

Easily the best aspect of *The Legend Of The Mystical Ninja* is the sheer amount of variety that Konami managed to cram in. Bursting at the seams with character and diversity, the second you boot the game you are greeted by wacky and humorous enemies and bosses, a world brimming with things to discover, and various little nods to other Konami franchises. You can't help but get immersed in the world. While the game can admittedly be a slow burn to begin with, this is largely due to the game throwing so much at you so quickly. Once you settle into the game you can't help but be captivated.

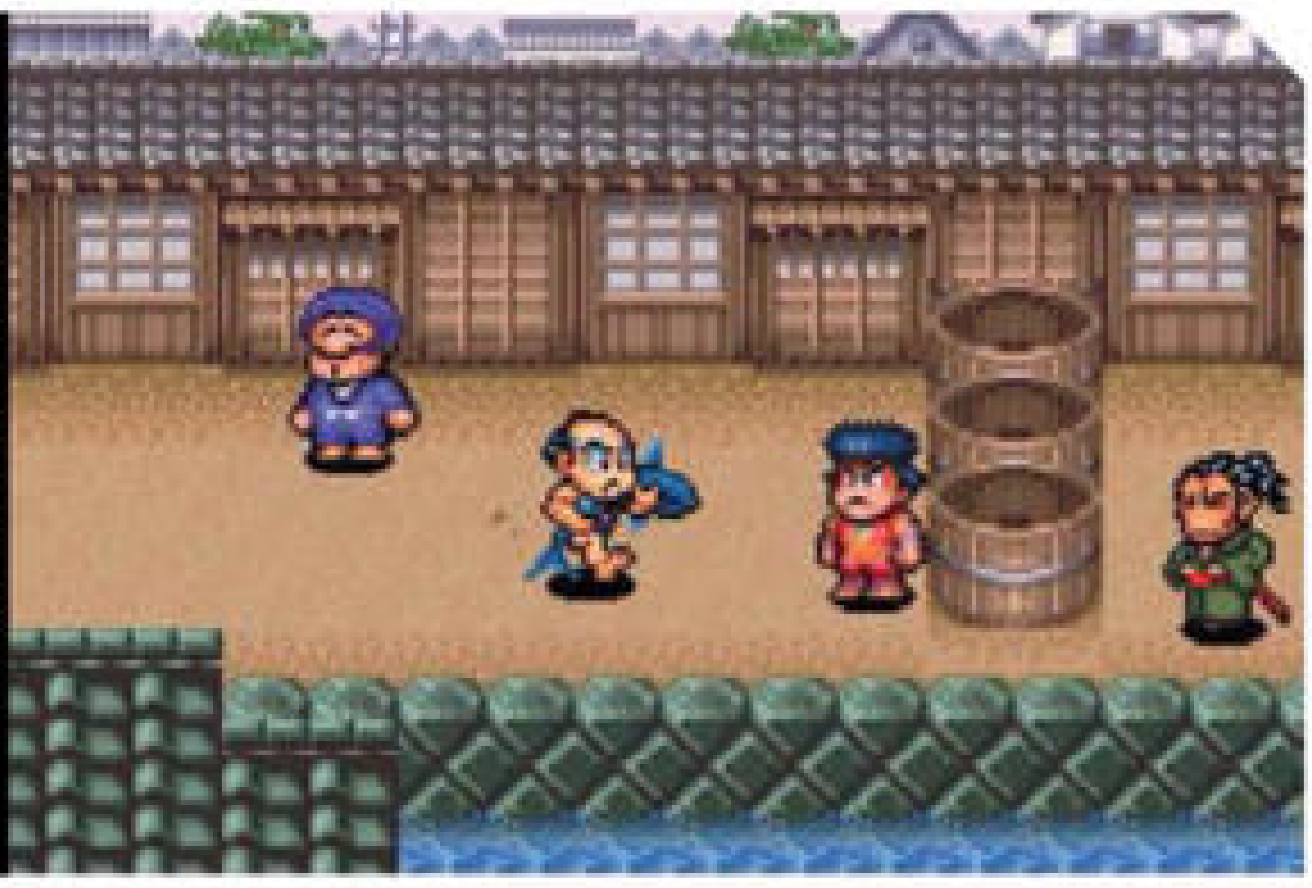
HOW DOES IT PLAY?



A game of two halves

The basic gameplay of *Mystical Ninja* is divided into two sections. The first section of each stage is reminiscent of titles like *Jack The Nipper* and *Everyone's A Wally*, and takes its cues from the NES series. Set inside various hamlets, full of quirky and often bizarre enemies, these sections show off the amount of effort that Konami put into the game. The second sections are more typical side-scrolling platformer bits, with tricky jump sequences, imaginative levels, and a large array of enemies and bosses to duff up. The contrast of the two styles works well to offer a platform game with far more character than its peers.

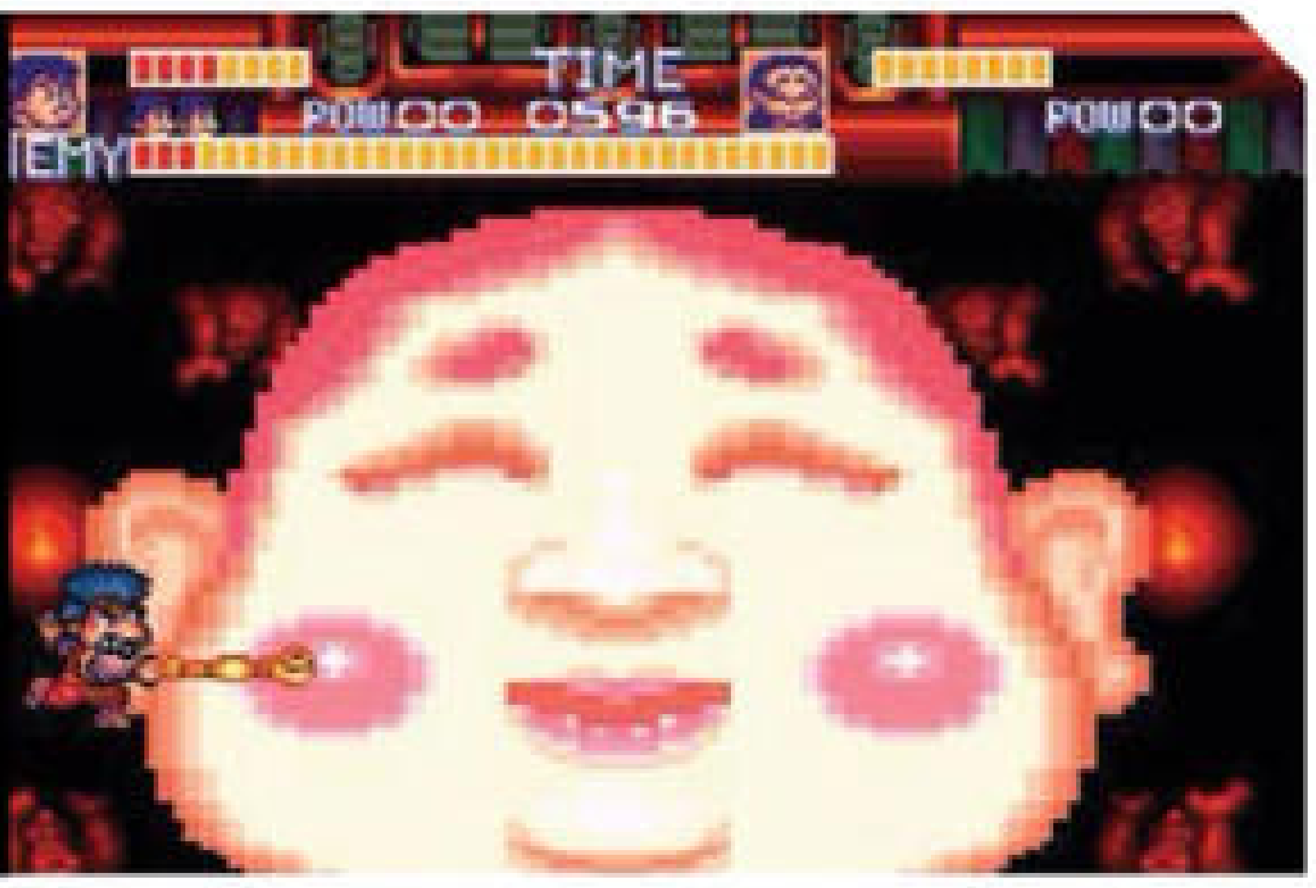
BEST MECHANIC



Kid Ying and Dr Yang

First introduced in *Ganbare Goemon 2* on the Famicom, one of the best elements of *Mystical Ninja* was the fact that two players could play through the game together as Goemon and his odd sidekick Ebisumaru, named Kid Ying and Dr Yang respectively in the West. Save for signature weapons, the differences between the characters are nominal, but the co-op mode does have its benefits. The characters can ride on each other's backs, allowing one to focus on attacking while the other moves. While this may sound a little awkward, it actually makes negotiating the trickier platform sections in the game a little bit easier.

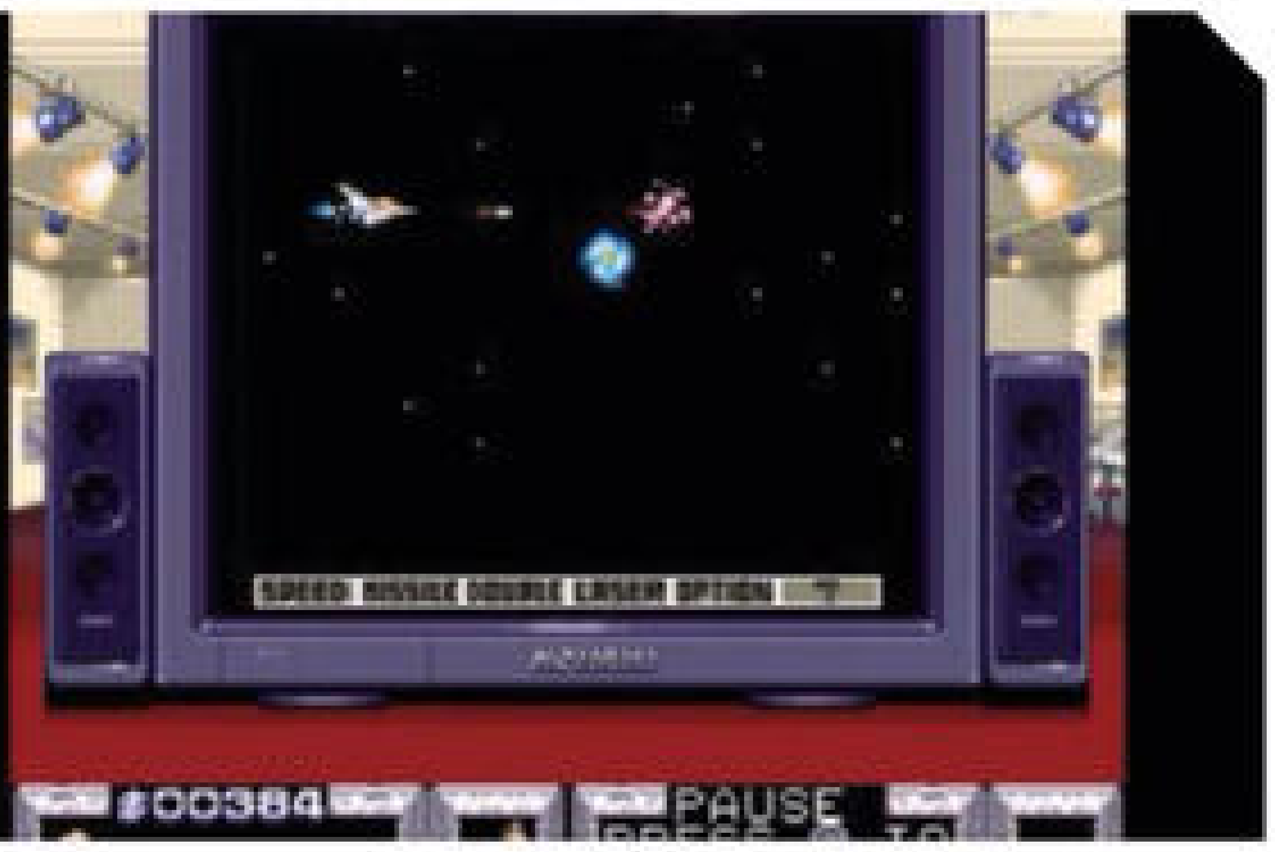
BEST BOSS



Memories from a geisha

There are plenty of memorable end-level bosses in the game, so picking one wasn't easy. In the end, we went with this thing: a chubby samurai tag team that changes into a giant floating head that looks like Gordon Brown made up to look like a geisha girl. Admittedly, we picked this boss entirely for that reason. If you're looking for a more sensible motive from us then we also like the way that whenever you hit this thing it grows until it envelops the entire screen, like something from a Roald Dahl story. It makes your job hitting it easier, but avoiding getting smothered by its chilling smile is much harder.

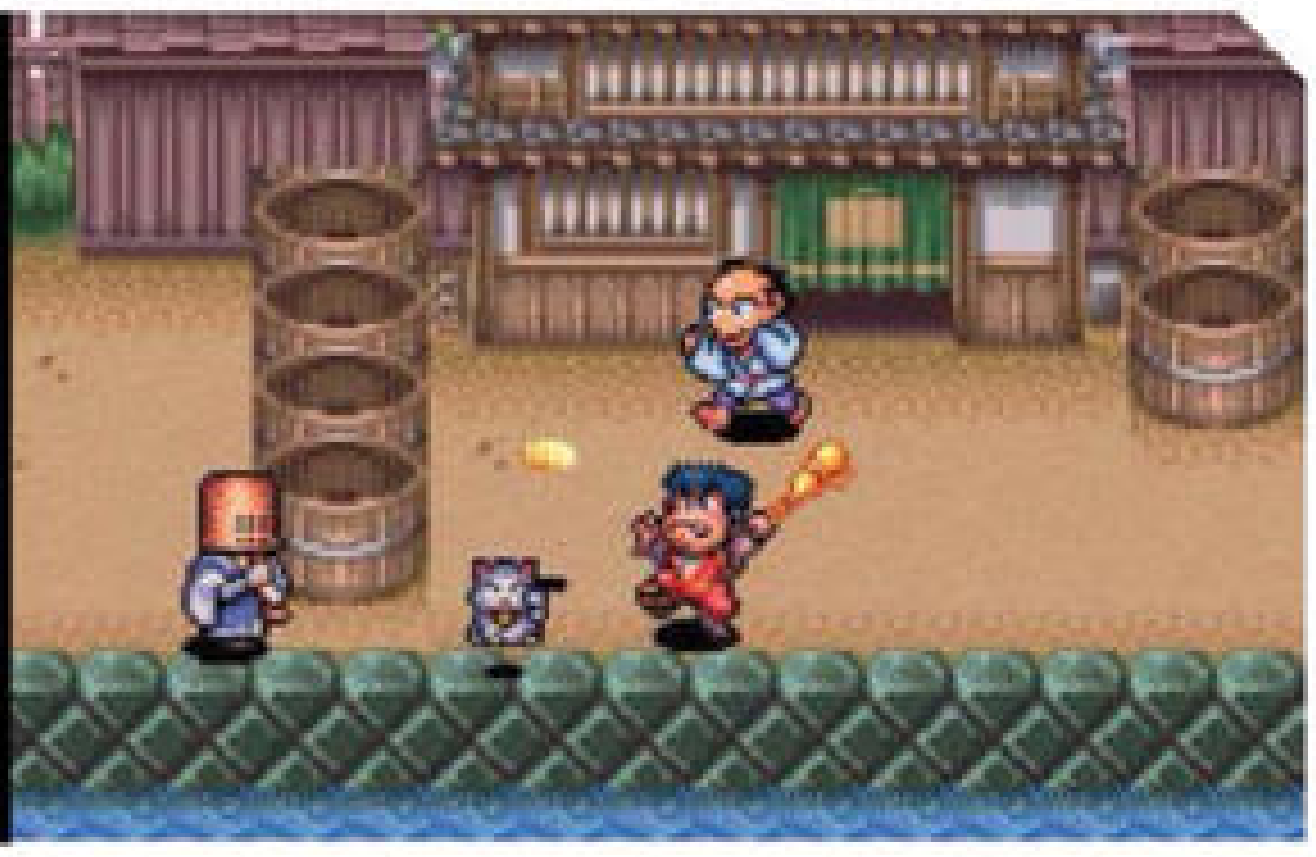
STANDOUT MOMENT



More than you can shake a pipe at

One of the best elements is the sheer amount of stuff there is to see and do in the town sections. You can place a bet on a horse race, partake in a quiz show, explore some cavernous 3D mazes, or even play some mini-games, including a one-level version of Konami's classic shooter *Gradius*. While rarely necessary to actually go exploring inside the towns – in all of the stages bar one, if we remember rightly, you can dash through these sections to reach the platform bits – these asides are a great way to replenish health, stock up on lives or simply take a much-needed break from the action.

BEST POWER-UP



Cat statues

Look out for the grey kitten statues that are randomly dropped by enemies, as they power up your weapons. Ying bonks his enemies on the noggin using a smoking pipe, while Yang uses his flute. The first phase will extend them, offering you a better reach, and the second will transform them into a yo-yo for Ying and a party blower for Yang. As well as this, each character can also use the money they find as a projectile weapon – a neat feature – and several different judo moves too, ranging from temporary flight and an attack that smites multiple enemies on screen, to a neat animal companion to ride on.

What the press said… ages ago

Mean Machines

"The Japanese excel at producing cutesy-style games, and *Goemon* must rank as one of the finest examples yet, with brilliant sprites and varied backdrops."

What we think

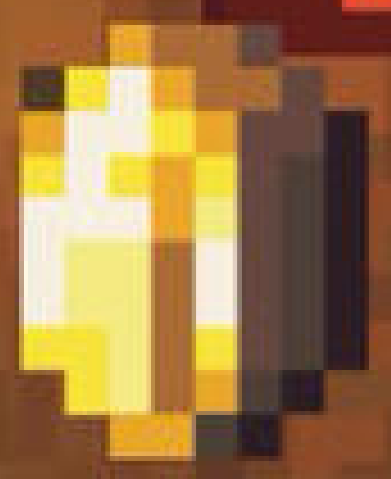
Mystical Ninja hasn't lost any of its charm. Actually, we found returning to the game as enjoyable an experience as when we first discovered it many moons ago. The graphics still look great, the music is still toe-tappingly catchy and the humour is still funny. A timeless classic, then.

THE LEGEND OF THE MYSTICAL NINJA

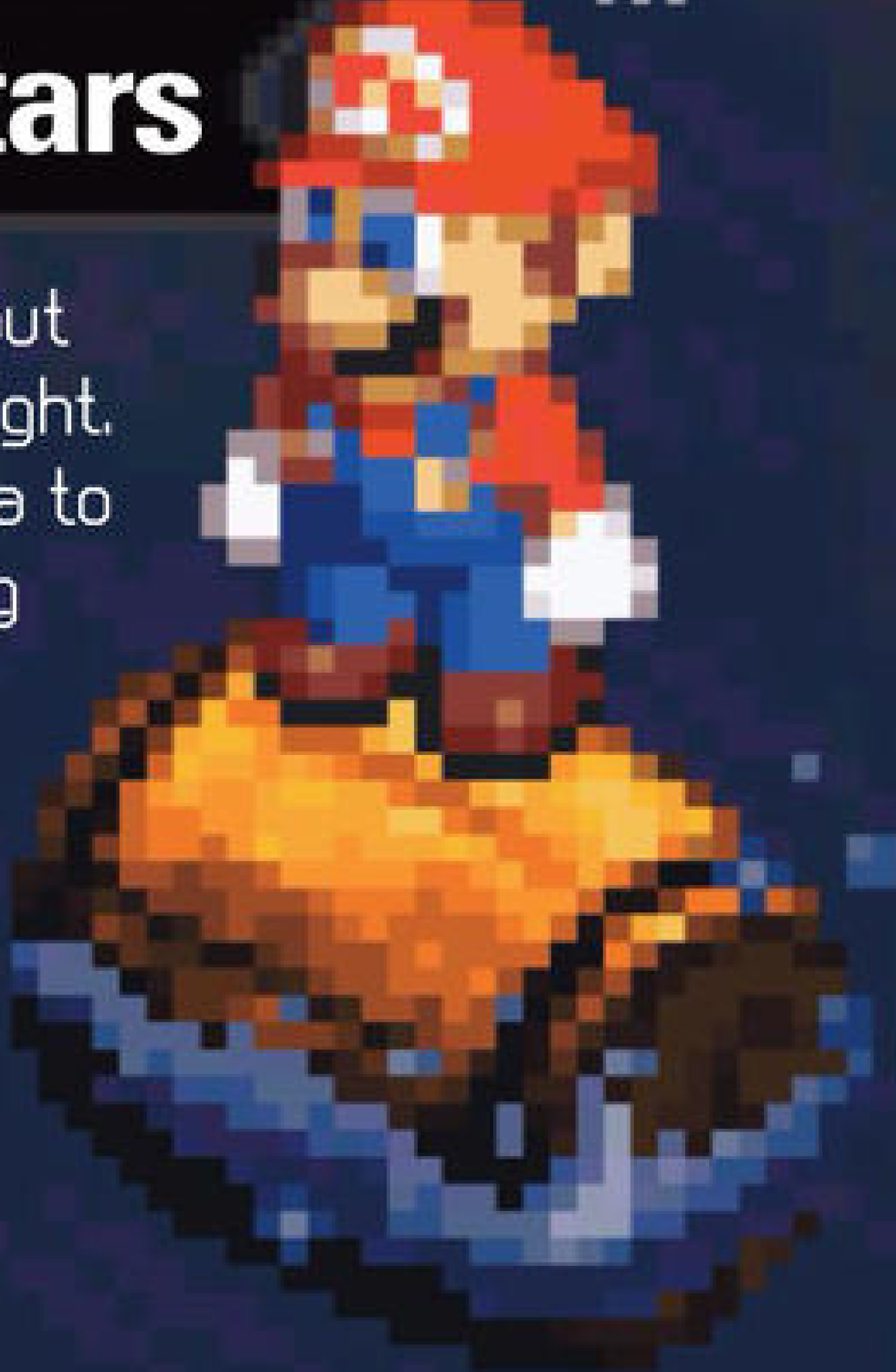
IN THE KNOW

- **PLATFORM:** SNES
- **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **RELEASED:** 1991
- **GENRE:** PLATFORM

SUPER MARIO RPG™



Legend Of The Seven Stars



1996 marked the end of the road for the SNES, but Nintendo wasn't about to let it go down without a fight. Sorrel Tilley caught up with director Chihiro Fujioka to get the scoop on Super Mario's super swansong

SUPER MARIO RPG
Legend of the Seven Stars

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO

» **DEVELOPER:** SQUARE

» **RELEASED:** 1996

» **PLATFORM:** SNES

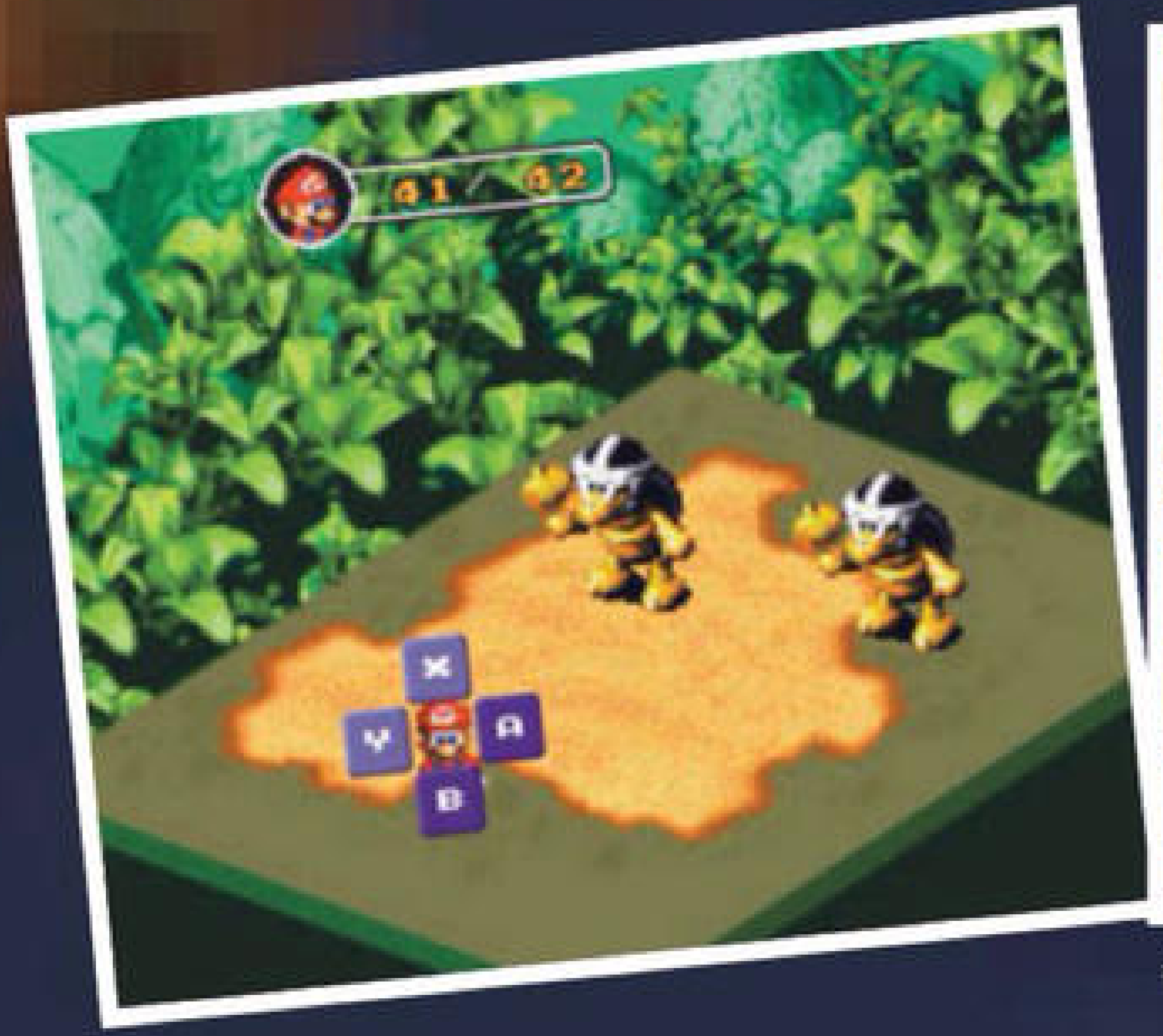
» **GENRE:** RPG

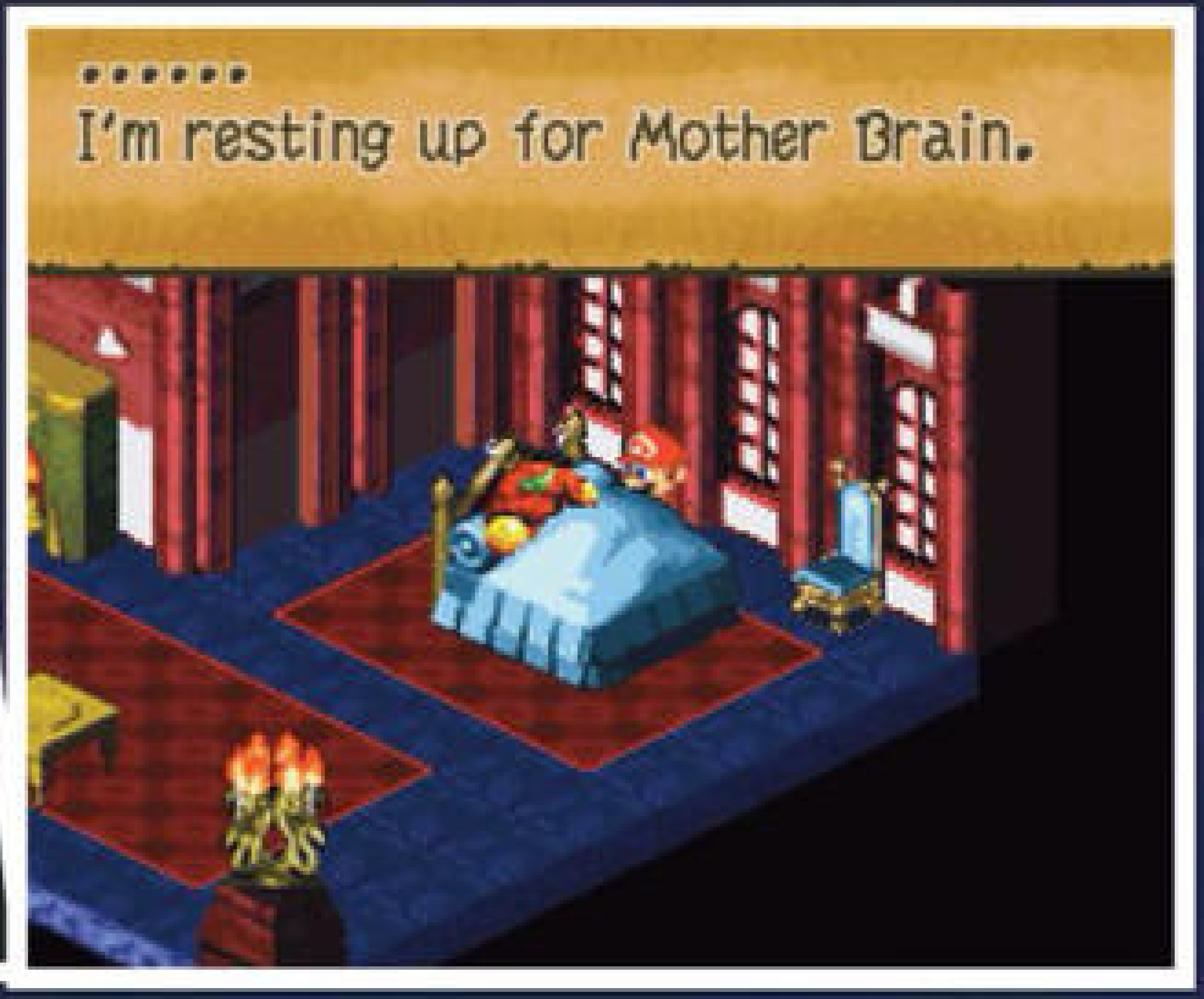
There's no denying it. Life was sweet for the SNES owner. Within the space of just five years, the system's library was swollen with classics, and chief among them were masterpieces crafted by Square and Nintendo. The mere mention of the likes of *Final Fantasy VI, Chrono Trigger* and *Super Mario World* are enough to send most gamers into paroxysms of nostalgia. It is said that all good things must come to an end, but even as the sun was setting on the SNES, behind closed doors the movers and shakers were planning something unprecedented – a collaboration between two of the biggest developers of the era.

The result of this partnership was Nintendo's moustachioed mascot's first foray in the role-playing genre. Square's own Chihiro Fujioka recalls how it went down: "The original idea was decided in meetings at the highest level. When I was put in charge, it had already been set in stone, but I heard that the background to it was that due to the very close relationship between Nintendo and Square in those days, working together on a project meant they would combine their respective strong suits – the Mario character and RPG development."

The basic concept was a simple one; its execution was not. Taking a beloved figurehead and throwing him headlong into a new genre without upsetting the fans requires a lot of thought, as Fujioka explains: "The world view and the story changed completely. In the beginning, we thought Mario would be fighting using weapons and magic, but as you'd expect, we concluded that Mario was more suited to the hammer and jumping, so we modified the settings and the story. Even after development had moved on, we were still beating our heads over whether or not Mario should use weapons and magic. Mr Miyamoto also seemed to be in two minds over this. It was only when we both took to the stage at a magazine event that we finally decided.

"It was at the V-Jump Festival, an event organised by Shueisha's monthly game and hobby magazine. Readers were invited to the venue so that publishers could introduce games that were about to be released. It was here that *Super Mario RPG* was revealed to the world for the first time – I remember how surprised the readers and the organisers were. Right at the time of this magazine event, we had to decide on Mario's fighting style – weapons and magic, or jumping and hammers? Even while we were backstage at the event, Mr Miyamoto and I were still talking it over. Then, when it became our turn to introduce our game, I said: 'Let's just decide his fighting style based on how much the





» [SNES] The eagle-eyed will spot plenty of Nintendo character cameos.

> In the beginning, we thought Mario would fight using magic, but we concluded that he was more suited to the hammer and jumping

audience applauds.' Mr Miyamoto replied doubtfully, 'Is that going to be okay?' but we went along with the plan anyway."

"To tell the truth, though, there was a feeling, among the staff too, that it would be best if Mario fought with hammers and jumping. Actually asking the audience was a big gamble, but I came up with a bit of a scheme to make sure things went our way. First, I said suddenly, but in a normal, businesslike voice: 'Could you please clap if you think that because this time Mario is in an RPG, it would be good if he used weapons and magic.' Small applause. Next, in a loud voice, full of energy and excitement: 'But of course this is Mario, so it'd be way better if he fought with jumps and hammers, right? Those people – applaud now!' Lots of applause. And that's how it turned out. Mr Miyamoto – sorry for worrying you!"

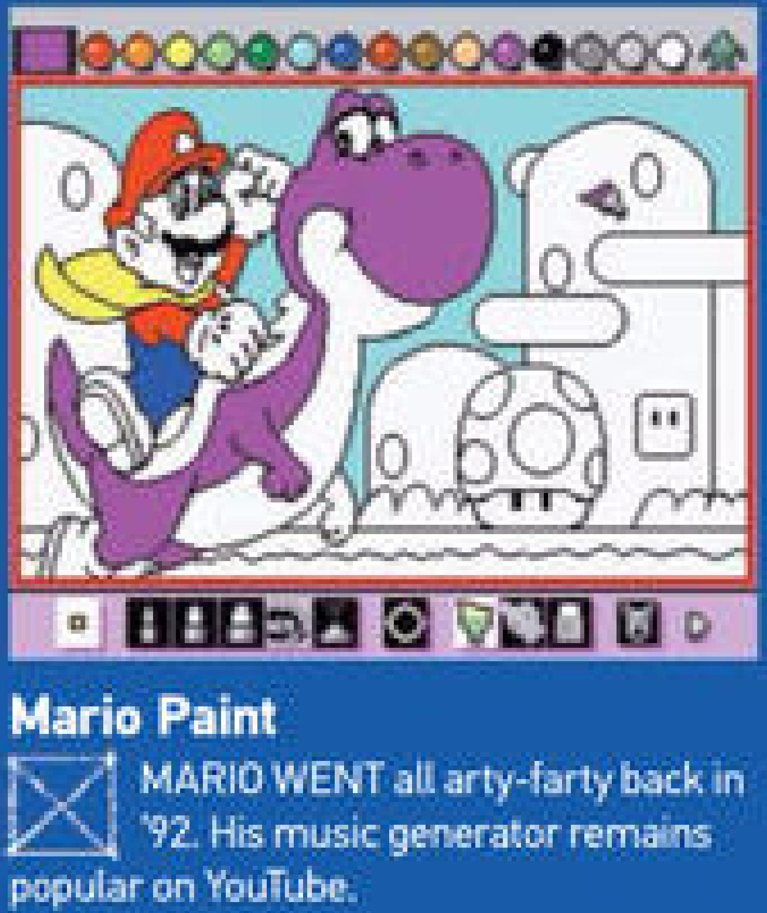
Mario's unexpected appearance in an RPG aside, audiences were wowed by his new 3D look. The team had been hard at work on the same Silicon Graphics workstations that Nintendo had authorised Rare to purchase for its *Donkey Kong Country* series. Although a rudimentary 2D version of the game was created, it was used mainly as a testing ground for Mario's movement and abilities before plans for the switch to 3D were finalised.

"At that point in time, Square was putting a lot of effort into visual presentation, and they had really pursued this up to the limits of what the Super Famicom hardware could do with 2D methods," explains Fujioka. "The big question was where to go from there. I think it was natural that things would go in the direction of 3D. When I think about it now, the whole of Square was headed that way. Of course, in the beginning, we had a traditional top-down map with a 2D Mario, but at a fairly early stage we revised it to a slanted 3D perspective, so after that we also had to make the entire graphic design follow suit. Even with the SA-1 chip, the Super Famicom wasn't capable of displaying 3D in real-time, so we went with a pre-rendering technique."

This SA-1 chip was another weapon in Nintendo's arsenal of enhancements that kept SNES games evolving over time. While Sega was developing pricey add-on systems to prevent the Mega Drive from becoming stale, Nintendo opted to boost its hardware with special co-processor chips included within the game cartridges themselves. Possibly the most famous of these was the Super FX chip, which handled the real-time 3D effects in games such as *Star Fox* and *Stunt Race FX*. The Super Accelerator 1 was less common outside Japan, with only three games seeing international release. "The SA-1 chip had four times the processing power of the Super Famicom," Fujioka elaborates. "Adding that to the console's CPU made five times the processing power possible. *Super Mario RPG* didn't use polygons, but the whole thing utilised a 3D field, so we used the extra oomph

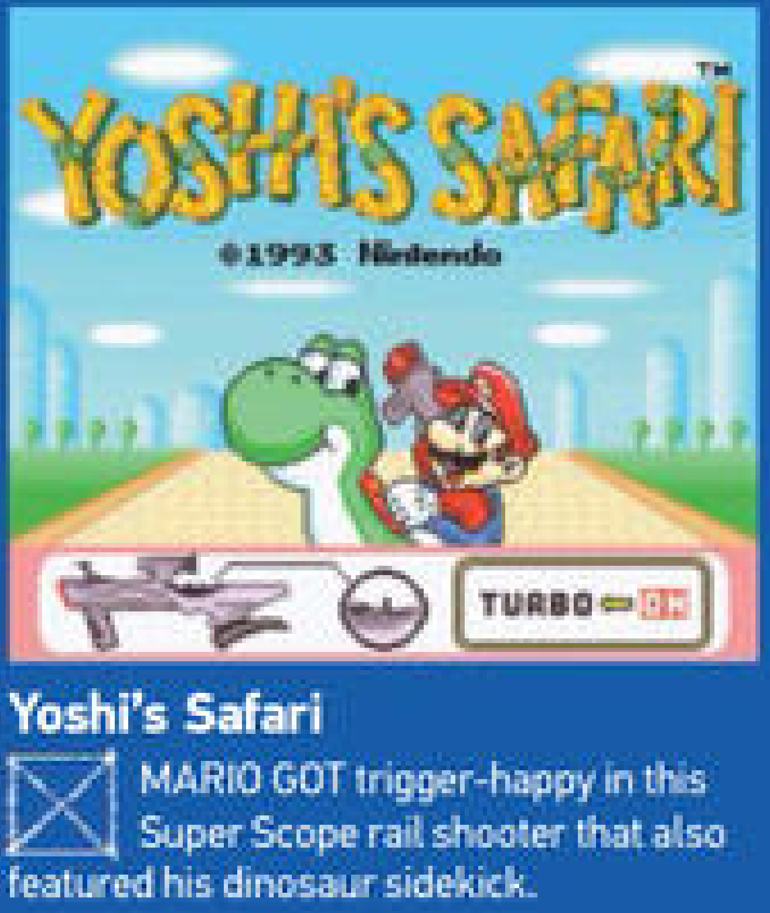
MOONLIGHTING MARIO

Is there a genre that Mario hasn't dabbled in? No…



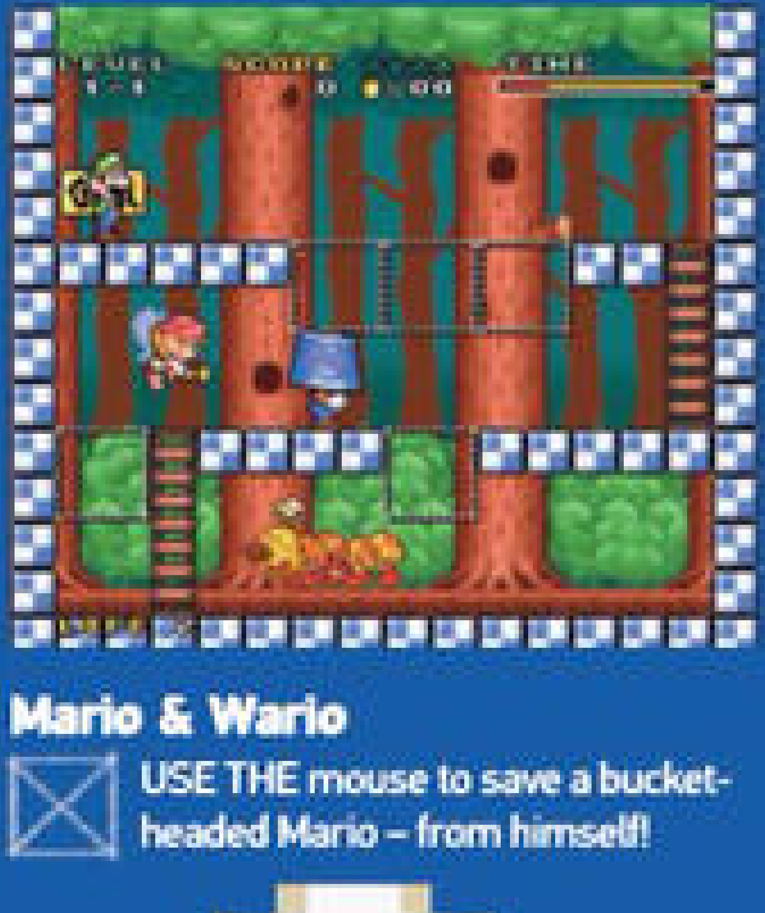
Mario Paint

MARIO WENT all arty-farty back in '92. His music generator remains popular on YouTube.



Yoshi's Safari

MARIO GOT trigger-happy in this Super Scope rail shooter that also featured his dinosaur sidekick.



Mario & Wario

USE THE mouse to save a bucket-headed Mario – from himself!

Dr Mario

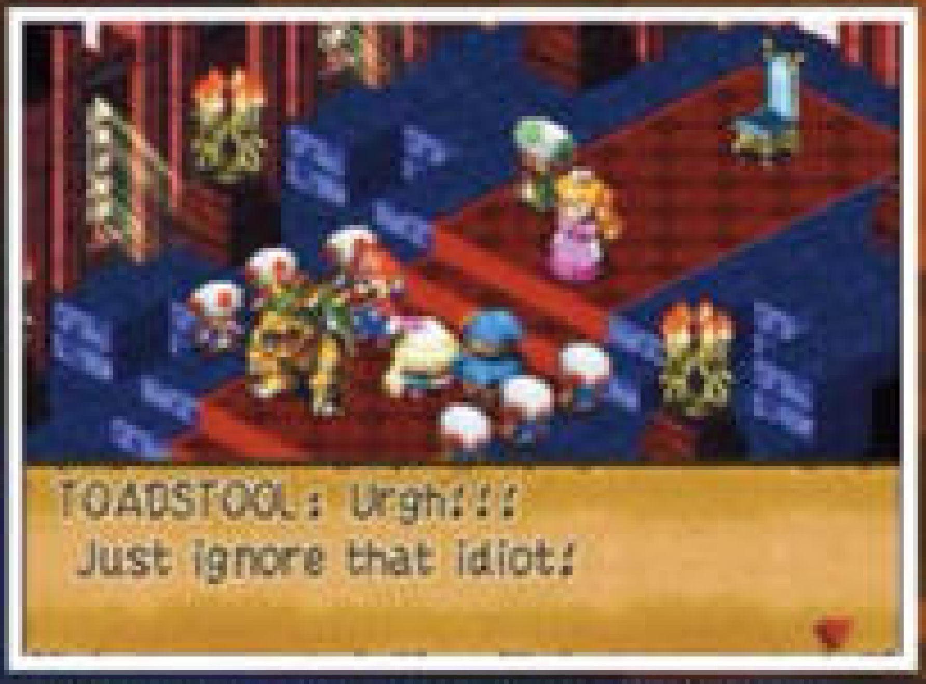
PRESCRIPTION PADS at the ready for this pill-poppin' puzzler.

Mario No Photopi

ONLY THE Japanese got this N64 photo-manipulation package.

for those calculations. It also allowed us to use more characters than usual."

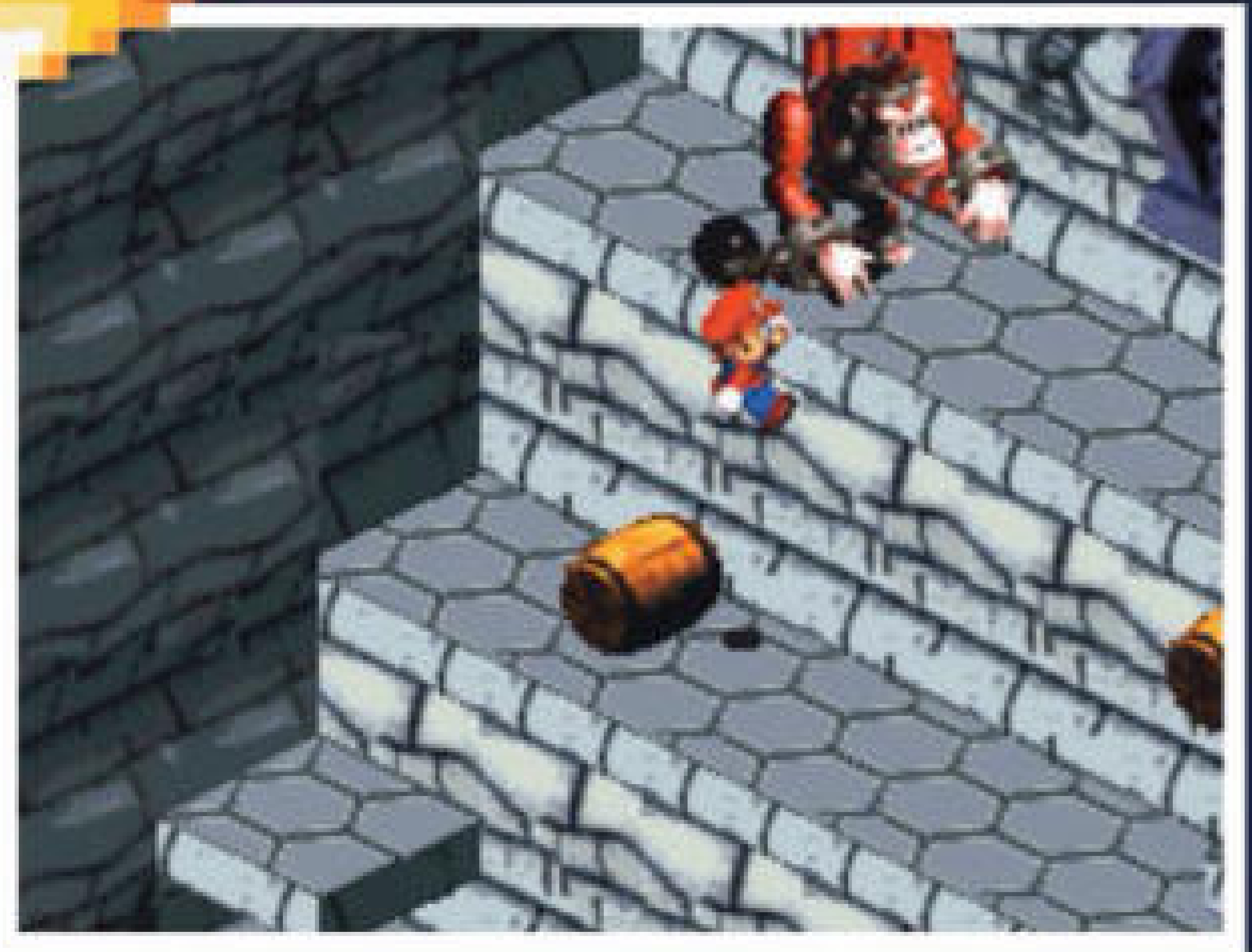
The game was primarily a Square production, but Nintendo made sure the team was not left floundering with Mario's transition to a new dimension and genre. "It was a very close and favourable relationship. They offered us support with various new techniques, starting with the SA-1 chip, and ideas for presenting pseudo-3D on the Super Famicom," Fujioka recalls. "From the beginning, Mr Miyamoto came in often to meet and talk, and of course we even took to the stage together at V-Jump. I received advice from him on two main points: one was keeping an eye on handling Mario's entry into the RPG world without destroying the *Mario* universe; the other was the actual concept of fun in the game – in the early stages of development, I proposed the gameplay that *Super Mario RPG* would revolve around, explaining: 'I want to achieve something that everybody wants to do, but nobody has been able to.' Mr Miyamoto approved."



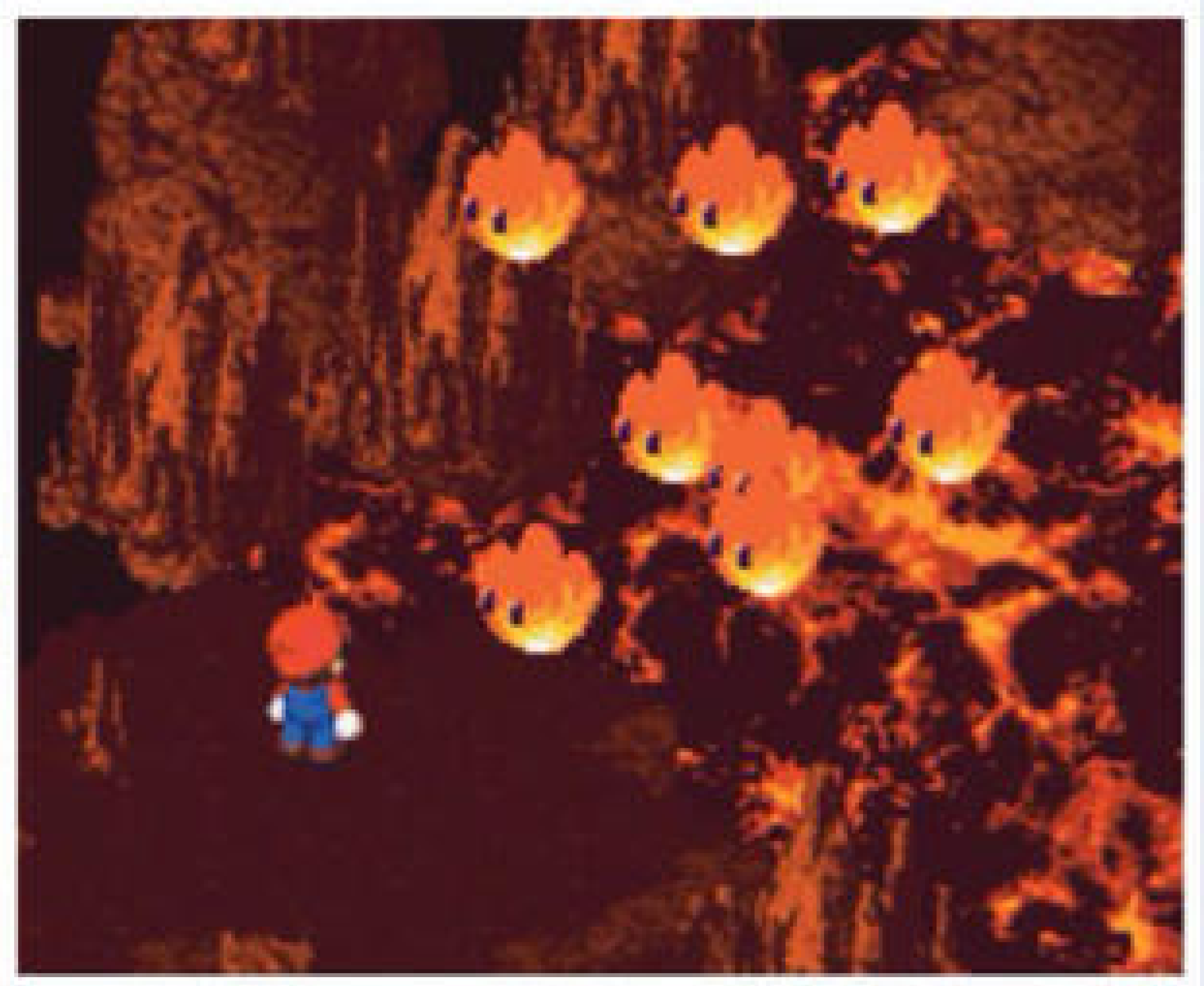
TOADSTOOL: Urgh!!!
Just ignore that idiot!

» [SNES] Why does nobody respect Bowser's authoritah?

Fujioka remembers another time that Miyamoto gave him advice while writing the script for moving yellow blocks in the game. Miyamoto noticed that it was possible for the player to easily slip and fall from these blocks, and suggested that Fujioka try making them stop for a split second when Mario landed. "I revised the code immediately, and the gameplay really improved. It was a great experience to be able to see first-hand Mr Miyamoto's fixation on game controls.



» [SNES] Square doffs its cap to *Donkey Kong Country*'s graphical influence here.



» [SNES] As well as all-new characters and enemies, traditional series tropes were re-imagined in new roles for *Super Mario RPG*

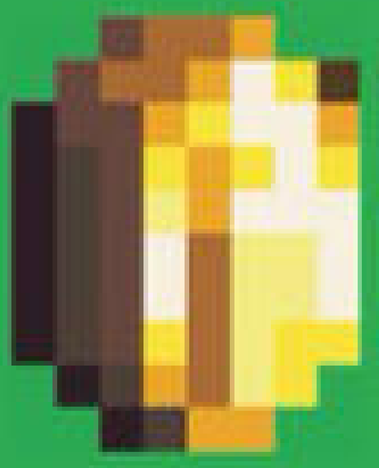
"This was a difficult area – how much of the action aspect of Mario to represent in an RPG and, further, how to actually achieve that. With regards to programming and scripting, almost all the events in the game had some kind of interactive gameplay, and customising the code for them one by one was a big job. 3D data was also created for everything from the backgrounds to the characters and items, but it was our first experience with that, so it was an incredibly tough job."

Even with a 4MB cartridge and the SA-1 chip, the game was bursting at the seams: "In terms of the game's content, there's one thing that even the development staff might have forgotten about. There were plans to include a shape-shifting boss character in the second half of the game, which would morph during battle. I persuaded the coders to put together a morphing program, which they made at once. However, I've now forgotten what his original form looked like! I did prepare two sketches for this boss, but I get the feeling they were completely altered during testing." Unfortunately, at that time, it was necessary to trim many areas from the ROM capacity, and the morphing boss became nothing more than a phantom character.

"There were a good number of other early ideas that didn't make it into the final game, but it would be more accurate to say that they were starting points, rather than things we couldn't do – they changed throughout the course of developing the game. For example, we wanted to have Mario use devices in one part of the map that would have a domino effect on various devices in other parts of the map, so in the early days, 'chain reaction' was something of a keyword that we based our ideas around. Expanding from that, we got all the areas with events that focus on action."

"Super Mario RPG's cast of characters and lighthearted story and script won over gamers and critics alike"

Super Mario RPG isn't only known for its technical accomplishments, however – its cast of characters and lighthearted story and script won over gamers and critics alike. Even Mario's long-time nemesis, Bowser, was given his first comedy role. Rather than kidnapping Peach and menacing the player characters, he teams up with them and spends his time alternately weeping over his stolen castle, reciting haikus about being lonely, and trying to convince everybody that Mario has joined his gang. "Mr Miyamoto didn't stipulate



MORE MARIO RPG SPIN-OFFS

When Square got into bed with Sony, Mario's role-playing future looked uncertain. Fans were overjoyed, then, when they got not one but two spin-off series

Paper Mario

Year: 2000 **System:** N64

WITH SQUARE out of the picture, a change of title was called for, so *Super Mario RPG 2* became *Paper Mario*. Just like its forebear, this game was released late in the system's life, and showed off some striking visuals, albeit in a different way – Mario was now flat as a pancake!

Paper Mario: The Thousand-Year Door

Year: 2004 **System:** GameCube

INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS' second game was also critically praised. It had a greater emphasis on gameplay based around the paper theme, with Mario using curses to fold himself into aeroplanes, boats and tubes. Side-scrolling sections featuring Bowser paved the way for the Wii sequel.

Super Paper Mario

Year: 2007 **System:** Wii

THE SERIES' third instalment continued to surprise gamers by toying with notions of 2D and 3D. *Super Paper Mario* returns the plumber to his platforming roots, but with a twist – the ability to switch between 2D and 3D perspectives at will. A sequel is due for the 3DS this year.

Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga

A Button! Confirm
10
10

Year: 2003 **System:** Game Boy Advance

CREATED BY AlphaDream with the involvement of Fujioka, this is often regarded as the true successor to *Super Mario RPG*. Why? "Maybe because it has the same battle system, musician (Yoko Shimomura) and comical story style. It's for handhelds and features Luigi, so I think it can coexist with *Paper Mario*."

Mario & Luigi: Partners In Time

Year: 2005 **System:** Nintendo DS

AS YOU might expect, *Mario & Luigi: Partners In Time* used the dual screens to expand on Mario and Luigi's interaction from the first game. The appearance of Baby Mario and Baby Luigi allowed for puzzles requiring the co-ordination of all four characters to solve this time-travelling adventure.

Mario & Luigi: Bowser's Inside Story

Year: 2009 **System:** Nintendo DS

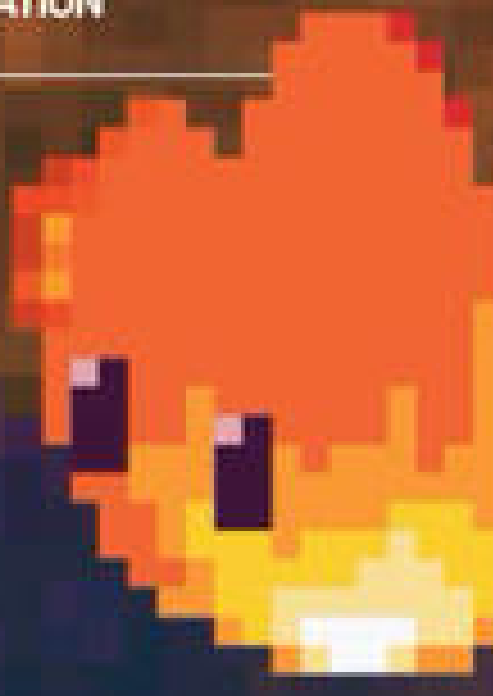
The latest game in the series took on an *Innerspace*-style dynamic, with the Italian duo being miniaturised and inhaled by Bowser. Will we see a fourth title in the series, possibly on the 3DS? Fujioka says: "This is still undecided. I'd be happy if we received a lot of requests to continue. Please root for us!"

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SECRET OF MANA (PICTURED)
SYSTEMS: SNES
YEAR: 1993

FINAL FANTASY
SYSTEM: NES
YEAR: 1987

XENOGEARS
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION
YEAR: 1998



any rules; he pretty much gave us a free hand, although he did let us know which series characters he wanted to appear," remembers Fujioka. "There were a lot of staff members who were fans of comedy and stand-up, so it was only natural that it would end up that way. Bowser's various lines and facial expressions were created freely by the people in charge of each area and event. It was all fine because Mr Miyamoto didn't get angry!"

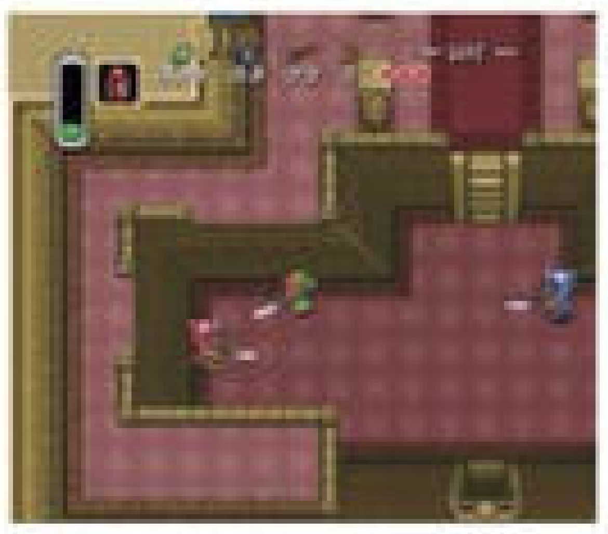
One of the most enduring original characters to spring from the game was Geno. Although legal issues between Square and Nintendo have prevented a full-blown comeback for the wooden boy, he has maintained a cult following. "I only found out about Geno's popularity later, so I got him to make a reappearance in *Superstar Saga* [laughs]. I wish I knew why he's so popular! I think people are interested in him because he's a doll that's come to life – he seems to have something of the profound about him."

Super Mario RPG was released just months before the Nintendo 64 went on sale and was an immediate success: "It was the point at which the highest number of gamers owned a Super Famicom and, thanks to this, we sold a *lot* of copies. On the other hand, with the N64 out and Square defecting to the PlayStation, we never got to make a true sequel."

On top of this, working on Mario's last game on the SNES must have been a bittersweet experience. "We had no idea!" admits Fujioka. Indeed, when Miyamoto announced at the V-Jump Festival that the game would be Mario's final 16-bit outing, Fujioka's reaction was short and comical: "What!?"

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA

THE BEST 2D ZELDA YOU'RE EVER LIKELY TO PLAY



- **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **RELEASED:** 1991
- **GENRE:** ACTION/ADVENTURE
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** SNES

HISTORY

It was certainly a case of third time lucky for Nintendo's classic adventure series. After *Zelda II: The Adventure Of Link* failed to capture the hearts of gamers like Link's original outing had, Shigeru Miyamoto went back to the drawing board. The end result was a truly spectacular adventure game that had everything you'd want from the genre. The story itself was excellent, involving Ganon and the kidnapping of seven descendants, one of which is Princess Zelda. Young Link must do his best to defeat the evil Ganon and restore peace to Hyrule.

He does this by traversing the huge overhead map, defeating monsters, collecting a variety of useful weapons — from slingshots to Pegasus boots — and solving a huge number of deviously designed dungeons. It's effectively following the template that worked so well for *The Legend Of Zelda* on the NES, but the 16-bit power of the SNES ensured that every aspect was far more majestic, from the gigantic bosses that Link often had to fight, to the gorgeous looking environments he explored.

By far the best part of *A Link To The Past* happens late in the game, when Link discovers the Dark World, a bleak alternate to Hyrule that is effectively a new world in itself to explore. Initially Link must traverse this dangerous environment as a rabbit, but he soon finds a way to return himself to normal and then has to zip back and fourth between the two worlds in order to properly complete his quest.

The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past is a masterpiece in game design, featuring well-paced encounters, a large number of clever puzzles to solve and some of the best designed dungeons to be found in the series. It received an update for the Game Boy Advance in 2002 that included an additional multiplayer game called *Four Swords*, but we vastly prefer the SNES original. It's going to be interesting to see if its 3DS sequel *A Link Between Worlds* continues the same high standards of the SNES original.

LIFE
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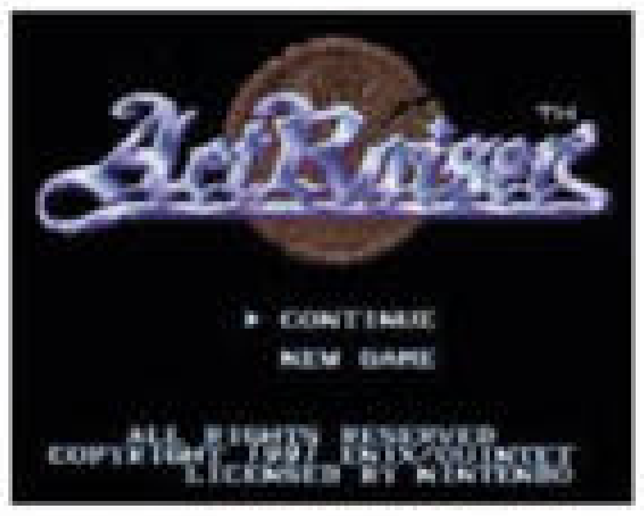
why you must PLAY

TIME 167
SCORE

SIM KASANDORA
ANGEL

ACTRAISER

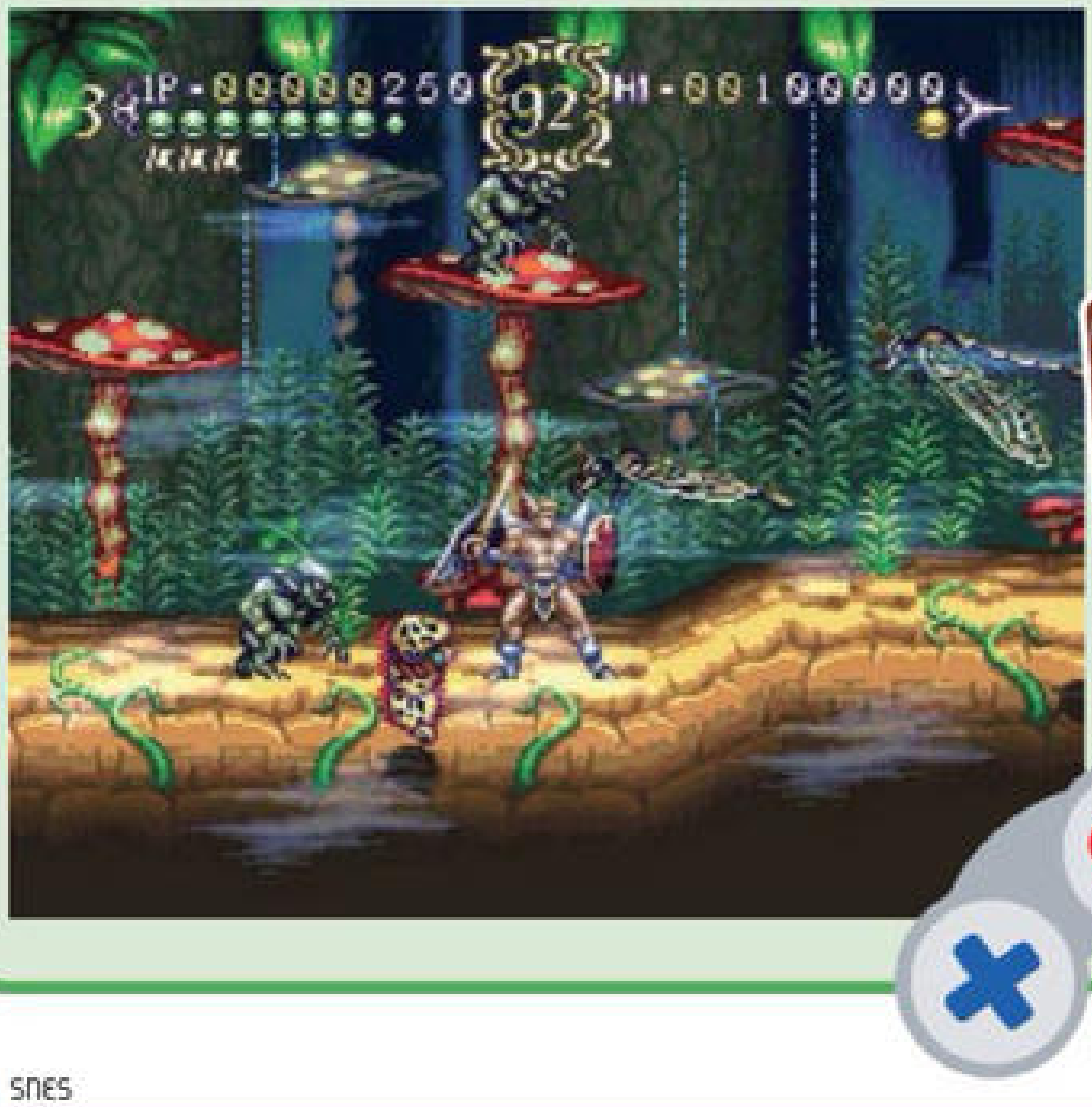


» **PUBLISHER:** ENIX CORPORATION
» **DEVELOPER:** QUINTET
» **RELEASED:** 1990
» **FEATURED FORMAT:** SNES

QUINTET'S 16-BIT CLASSIC REMAINS ONE OF THE MOST INNOVATIVE GAMES ON THE SNES, DELIVERING A MIX OF ACTION AND SIMULATION THAT NO OTHER GAME HAS EVER BEEN ABLE TO MATCH. FAMED FOR ITS FANTASTIC AUDIO SCORE AND SUPERB LOOKING VISUALS, THERE'S NEVER BEEN A BETTER TIME TO REVISIT THIS EVERGREEN FAVOURITE. JUST DON'T TALK TOO MUCH ABOUT THE SEQUEL…

ONE SEQUEL TOO MANY

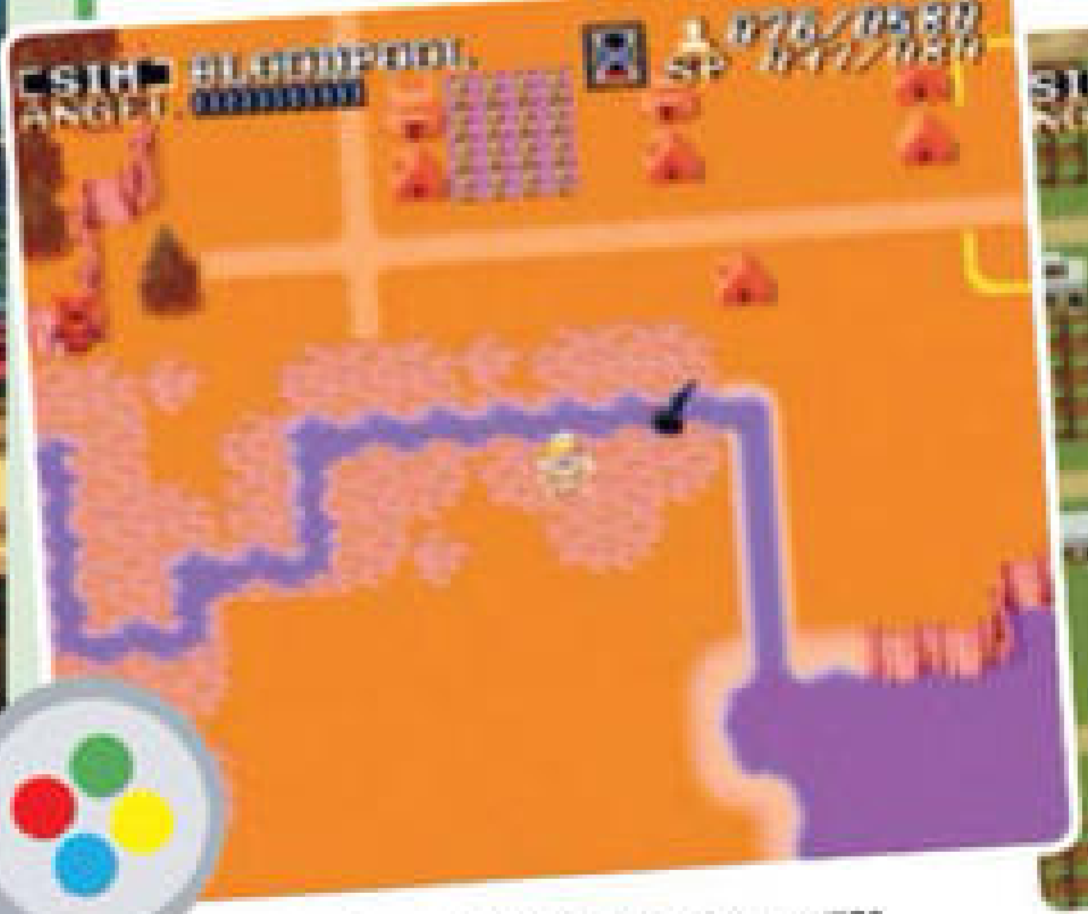
Considering how perfectly crafted the original game was you'd have expected a sequel to be even better. Sadly, *ActRaiser 2* was a huge fall from grace that wasn't a patch on its inspiration. Granted, Yuzo Koshiro's score was as good as ever and the graphics were to die for, but somewhere along the line Quintet had forgotten to include the all-important gameplay. Worst yet, the sim sections had been abandoned, meaning that *ActRaiser 2* was no different to many of the other scrolling fighters that were available. With its horrifically clunky controls, the insane difficulty and poor level design, *ActRaiser 2* is perfect proof that sometimes you can only bottle lightning once.



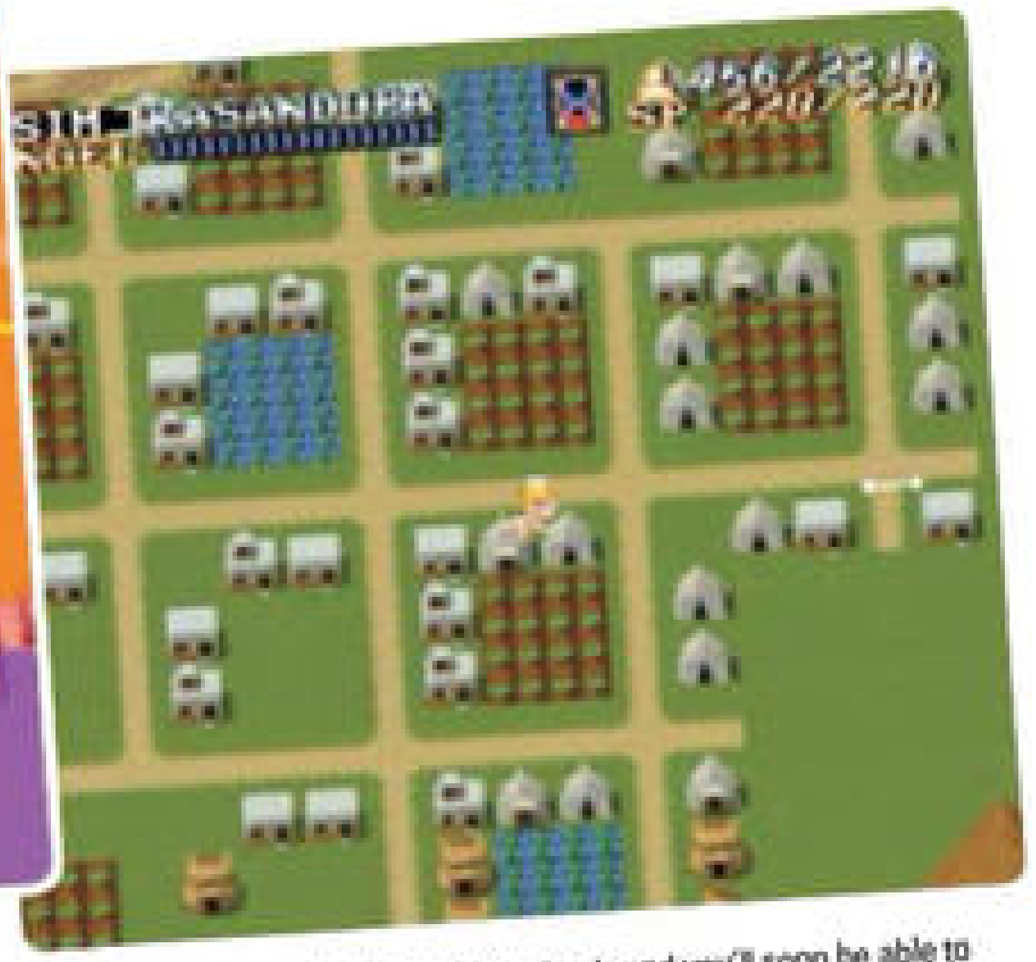
Games that straddle genres are always a difficult sell, so it comes as no surprise that Quintet's outrageously polished *ActRaiser* didn't find the fanbase it deserved when first released. Part scrolling slash-'em-up, part God sim, *ActRaiser* was like nothing else around upon its arrival in 1990, and three years later, when it appeared on UK shelves, it still managed to stand apart from virtually every other available SNES game.

Maybe it was the fact that it arrived three years too late, (although aesthetically it still stood head and shoulders over a great many other SNES offerings), or perhaps the mish-mash playing styles were too conflicting. Nevertheless, despite receiving praise in numerous magazines at the time, *ActRaiser* didn't exactly set the charts alight – a shame as it's a wonderfully unique experience that offers plenty of outstanding gaming moments for those willing to track it down.

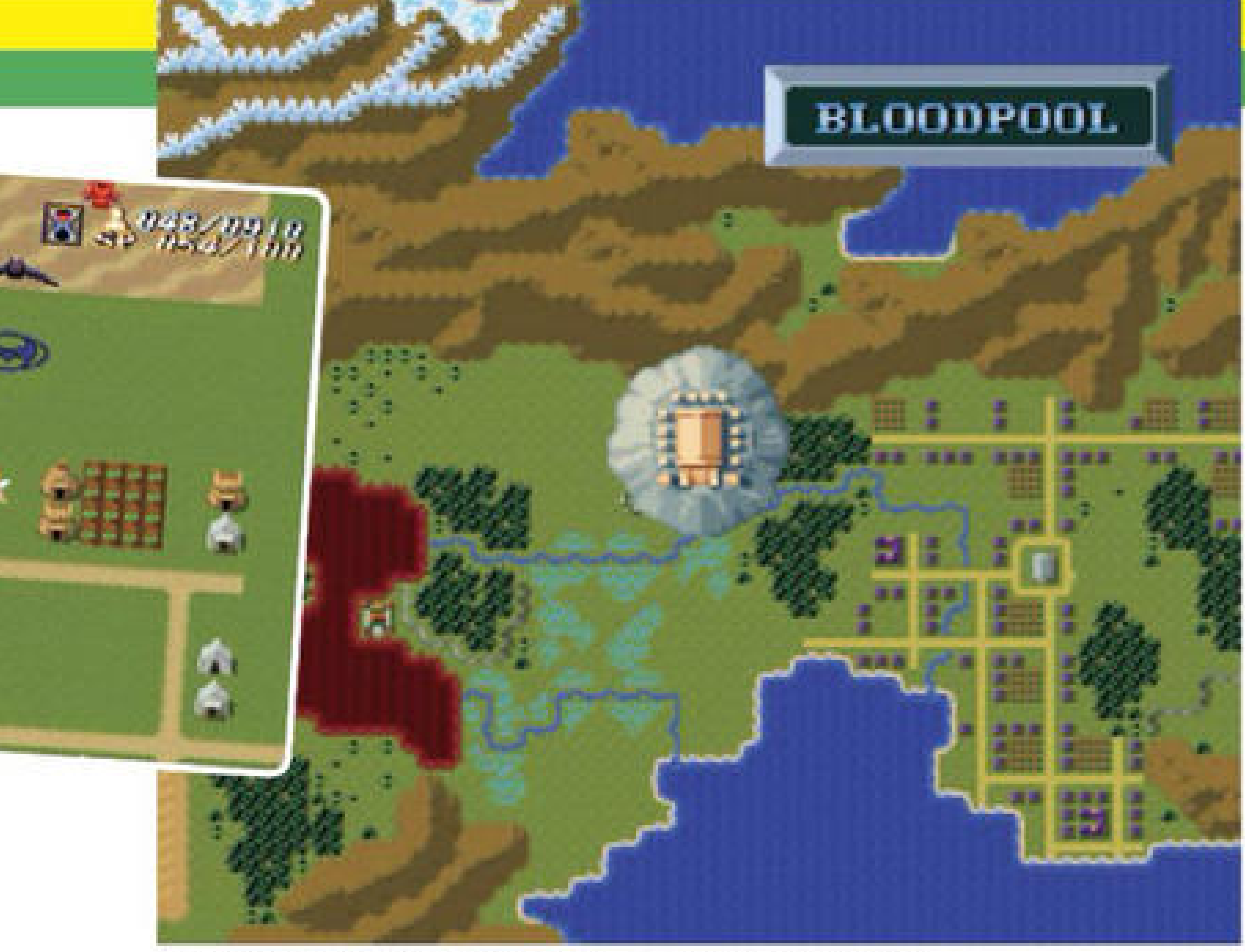
It's never easy being a God and the being you control in *ActRaiser* is having a particularly hard time with his newfound divinity. The people of the world he oversees are crying out for spiritual guidance and need protecting from the many vicious monsters that your nemesis Tanzra has unleashed into the world. Only when all six realms have been secured will Tanzra's resting place finally be revealed and give you a chance of stopping your monstrous



» [SNES] Ue the power of sunshine to clear swamps and make them habitable for your followers.



» [SNES] Keep building up your lands and you'll soon be able to grow a selection of different crops. Alright… just two.



» [SNES] The Sky Palace is the home of your god and allows you to travel across the Mode 7 world.

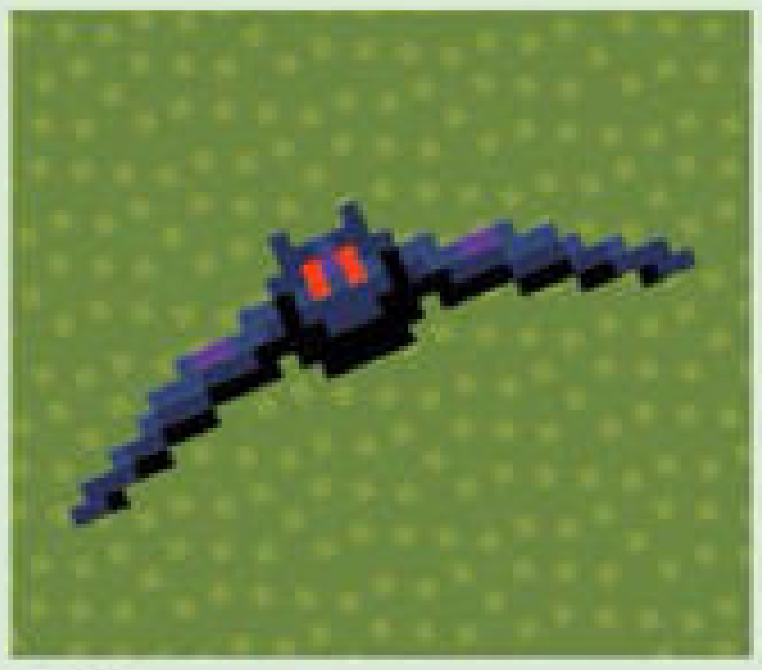
foe once and for all, but before that happens, you've got plenty of work to occupy your divine hands.

Fortunately, you're aided throughout your adventure by an affable angel, who not only fills in the role as personal advisor, but also acts as a controllable avatar for when you're let loose in *ActRaiser*'s sim sections. Full of useful information, he'll constantly give you subtle hints to ease your progress through the game and acts as a go-between for you and your followers. He's a charming creation and by the end of the game you'll have built up quite a rapport with the little fella. It's this interaction between yourself and the game that proves to be one of *ActRaiser*'s in strengths. One section sees you rescuing a young boy called Teddy, only to be told by your angel companion at *ActRaiser*'s poignant finale that the young lad had died earlier, but you weren't told for fear of getting upset. Quintet's opus sucks you in, and despite not having a single cutscene *ActRaiser* boasts a cinematic quality that few other 16-bit titles can muster. Indeed, everything about Quintet's game is on an impressively grand scale, and as it deftly switches between genres, like a great rollercoaster, you can't help but be taken along for the ride. Well we say rollercoaster, but *ActRaiser* is more akin to a log-flume. The sim sections are equivalent to the slow steady climb to the ride's zenith while *ActRaiser*'s outrageously good battles are comparable to the flume's final dizzying drop. And like all good rides, as soon as you've finished it, you'll be instantly returning for another go.

Ah yes, the action sections. Granted, the animation might not impress like it once did, and practically every boss you face is deceptively easy to defeat, but goddamn, they're still enjoyable to play through. Crammed with amazing attention to detail, the countryside you hack and slash your way through would be the perfect place to stop for a picnic if it wasn't for the many monsters you continually face. From the lush verdant forests of Fillmore, to the icy wastes of Northwall, *ActRaiser*'s environments are breathtaking in scope and many of them (Aitos and Northwall in particular) can still draw the odd gasp of wonderment. It wasn't just the locations that had been given plenty of care and attention, as the many opponents you face off against (particularly some of the huge bosses) add to *ActRaiser*'s graphical grandeur. Animation may look rather basic

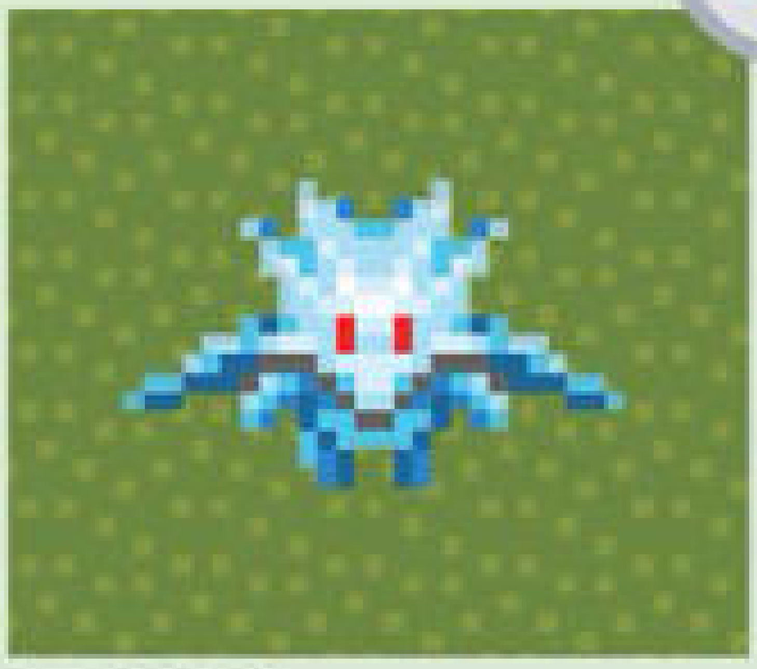
KNOW YOUR FOE

Just a few of the enemies you should look out for



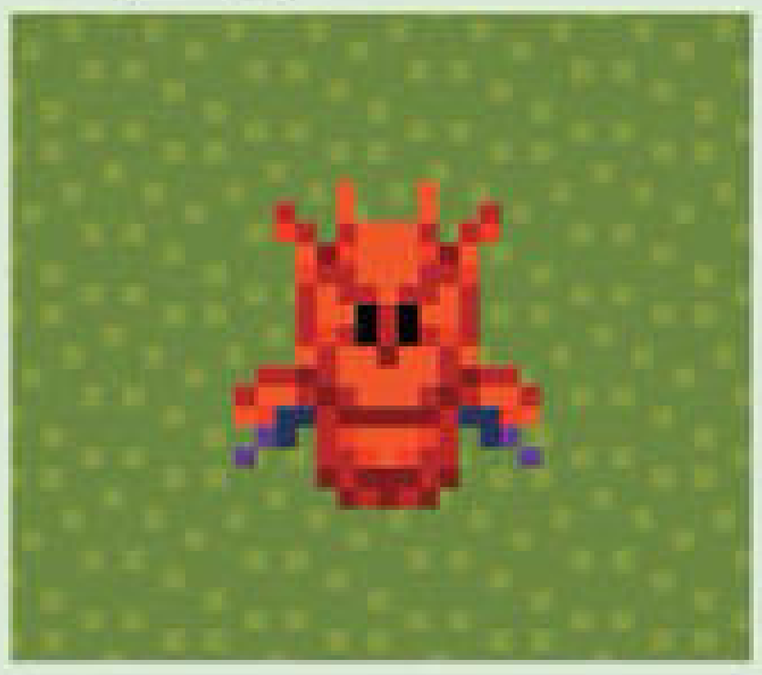
BAT

Carries off followers whenever it gets the chance. Can be killed with a single shot from your angel's bow.



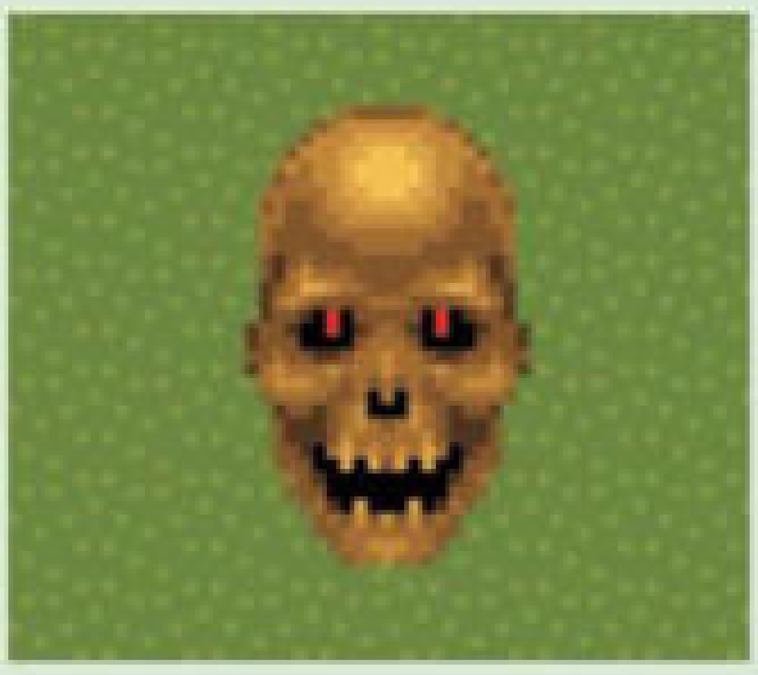
DRAGON

Uses lightning to destroy houses. Can be killed with two hits from your angel's bow.



IMP

Destroys crops. Can be killed with three hits from your angel's bow.



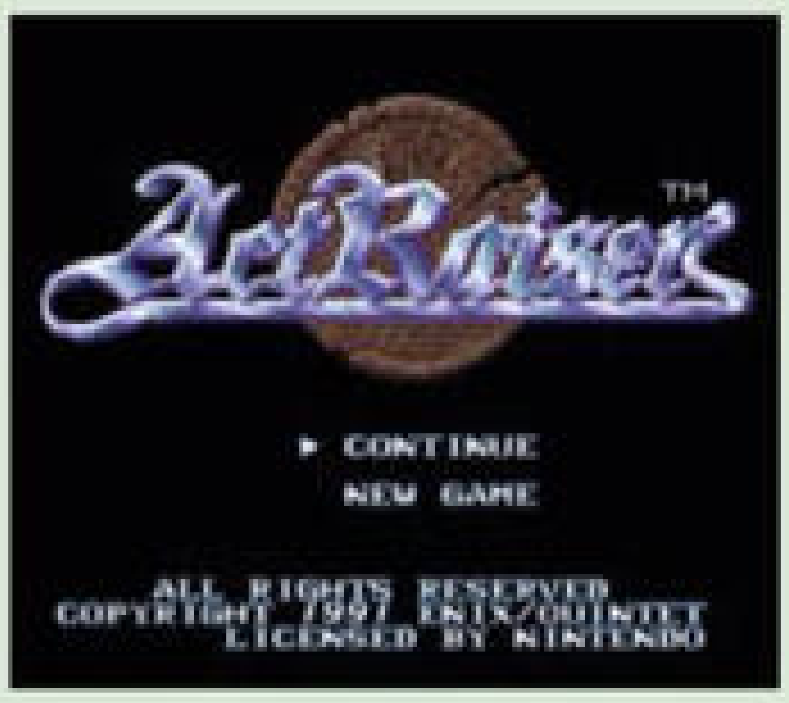
SKULLS

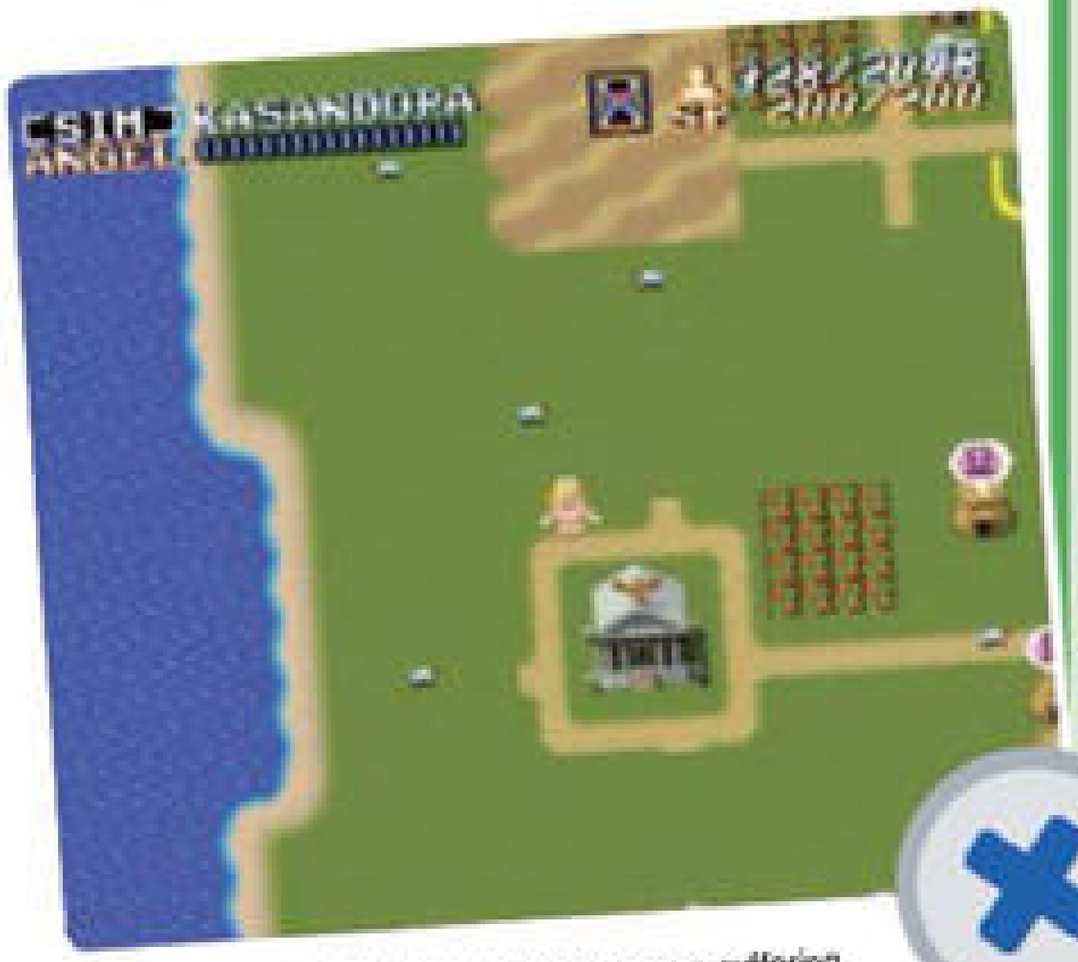
Creates devastating earthquakes that cripple villages. Can be killed with seven shots from your angel's bow.

> "EVERYTHING ABOUT QUINTET'S GAME IS ON AN IMPRESSIVELY GRAND SCALE"

MAGICAL MOMENT

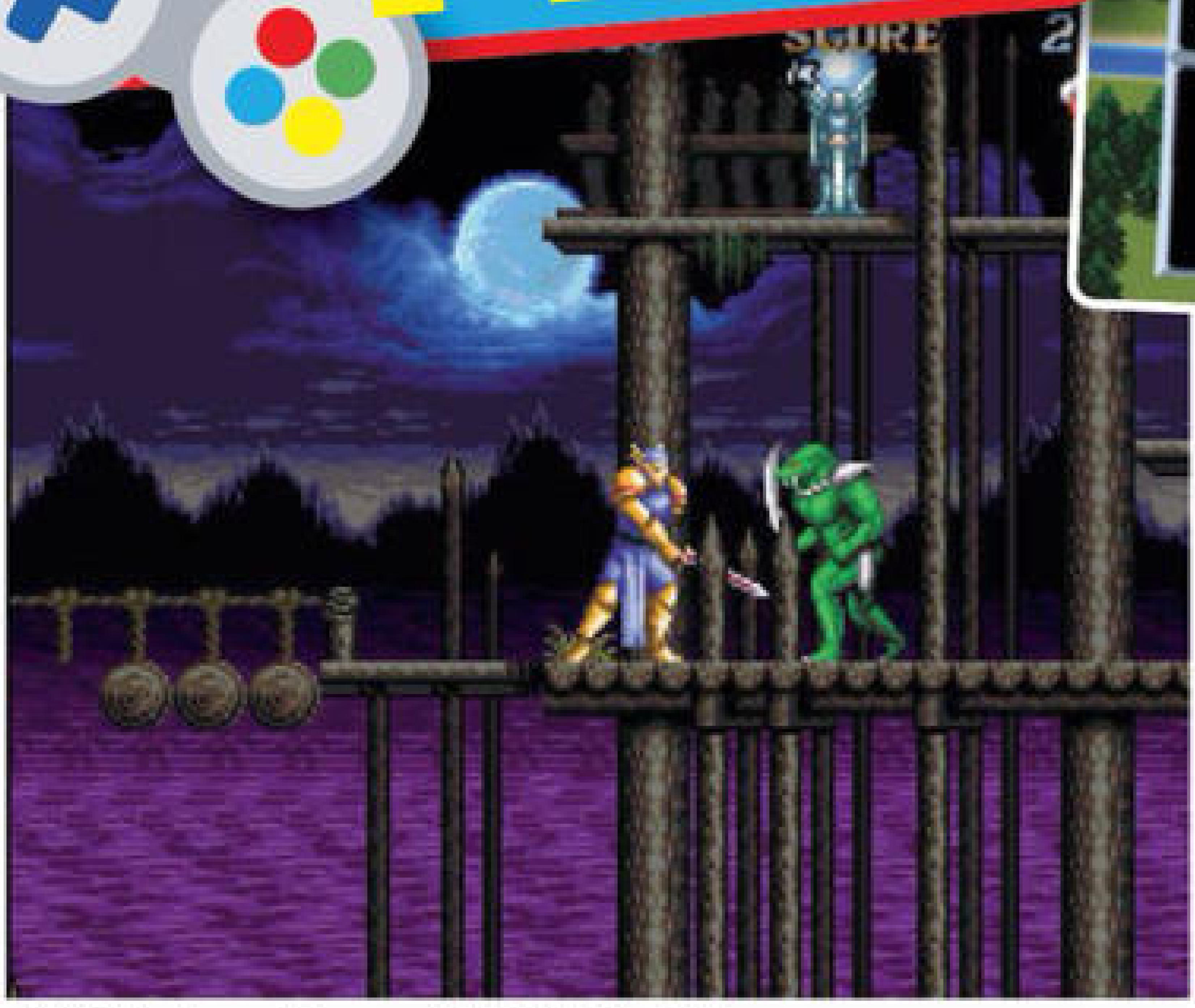
The game's not even started yet, but look how amazing the title screen is. Using the SNES's nifty Mode 7 the *ActRaiser* logo swirls around the screen to some truly excellent music. This is the stuff dreams are made of. Look at it swirling around, wooo, it's actually quite hypnotic. We could sit and watch this for hours, just losing ourselves in its silvery world.



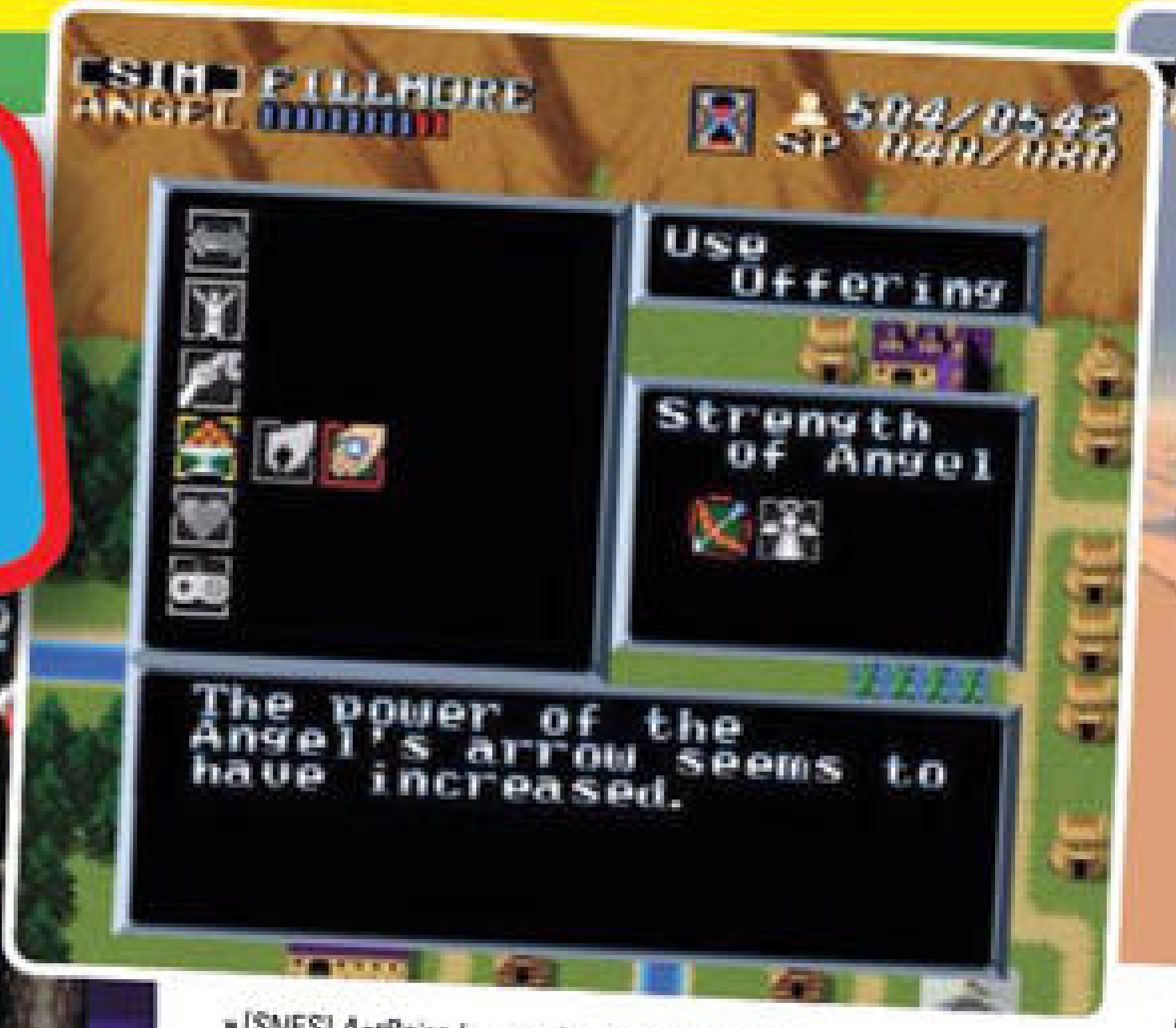


» [SNES] Your poor followers are suffering from the plague. Surely one of the neighbouring countries has a cure?

why you must PLAY

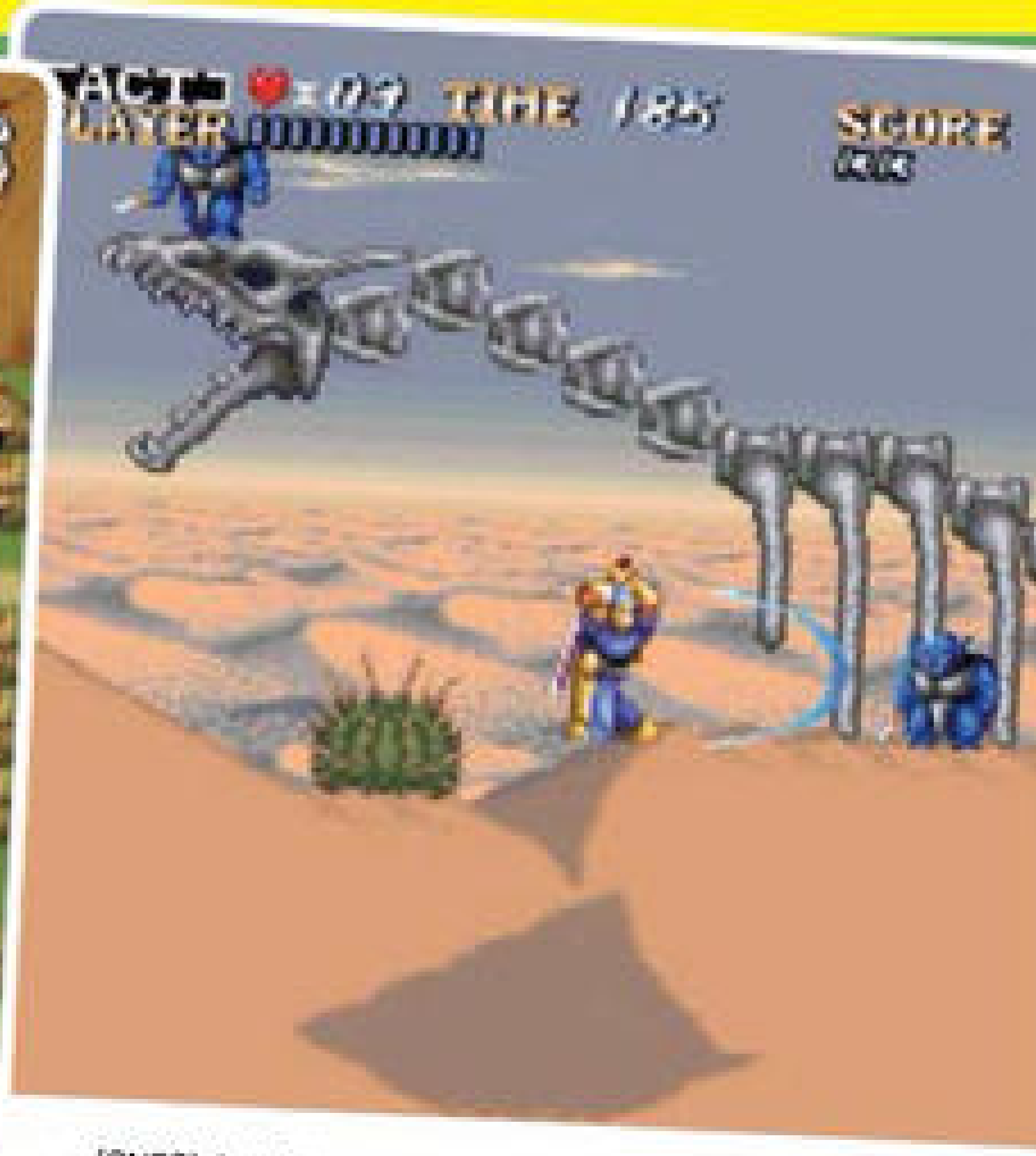


» [SNES] The landscape may look gorgeous but it's filled with all sorts of dangers.



The power of the Angel's arrow seems to have increased.

» [SNES] *ActRaiser's* menu is simple in looks but wonderfully intuitive to operate.



» [SNES] *ActRaiser's* many scrolling levels still stand up today and look absolutely beautiful.

"ACTRAISER STILL RETAINS A REFRESHING UNIQUENESS THAT ENABLES IT TO STAND PROUD AGAINST MANY OF THE SNES'S BETTER-KNOWN TITLES"

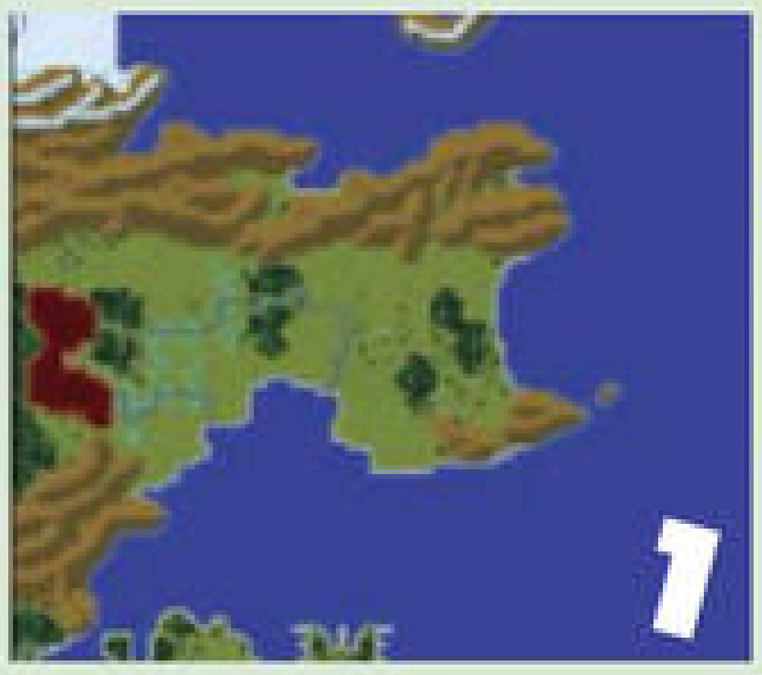
nowadays, but the sprite design featured throughout remains as strong as ever. Cute shambling apes, giant Ent-styled trees, mischievous looking gnomes and vicious lizard men may be little more than cannon-fodder for the impressively armoured knight you control, but that didn't mean that Quintet hadn't showed them any less attention than *ActRaiser's* mayors. Axe-throwing minotaurs, flame-spewing manticores, viciously fast water dragons, heavily-armoured centaurs, *ActRaiser's* bosses were very impressive and few will forget the last stage that sees you fighting several of them in quick succession before finally facing Tanra himself.

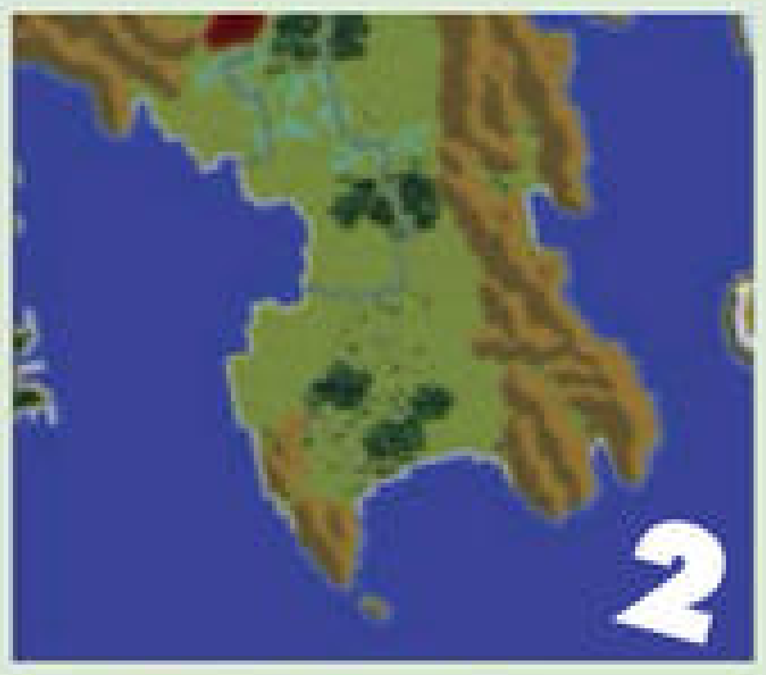
In truth though, *ActRaiser's* visuals tell only half the story, as it was its stunning soundtrack that truly drove home the game's cinematic qualities. Wonderfully bombastic in its scale and featuring a stunning range of orchestral tunes, *ActRaiser* is an aural delight and its selection of beautifully varied tunes never fails to impress. From the 20th Century Fox-styled opening that accompanies the swirling title screen, to the heartrending ending (all flutes and pipes), *ActRaiser's* music is as integral to the game as its actual gameplay and it's impossible to think of having one without the other. Of course, when you discover that *ActRaiser's* rousing score is by Yuzo Koshiro, the legendary musician behind the likes of *Shenmue*, *Revenge Of Shinobi* and the excellent *Streets Of Rage* trilogy, everything begins to make perfect sense.

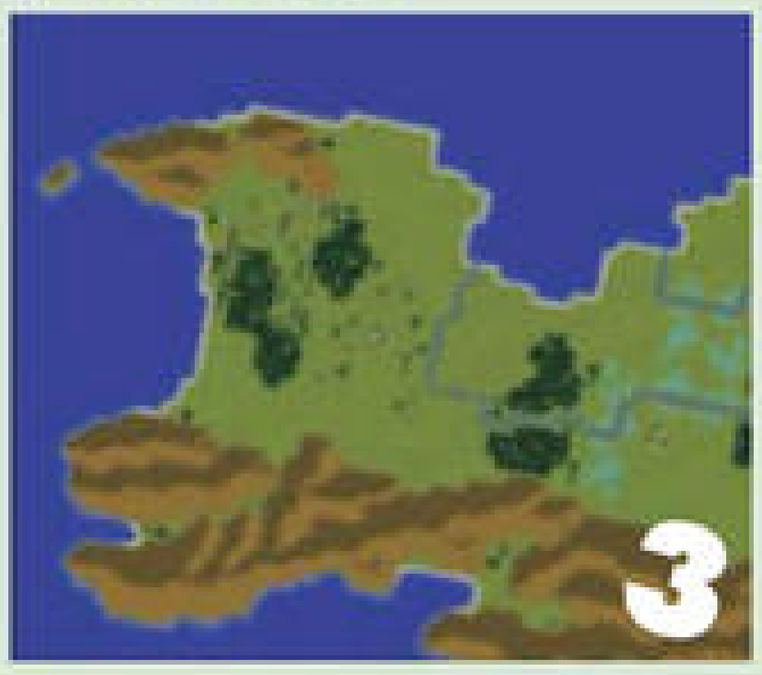
So with its stirring music, beautiful visuals and cleverly juxtaposed genres *ActRaiser* sounds very nearly perfect, and it very nearly is. The only small downside to this beautifully crafted creation is that it's a little too easy, although in another way that can actually be seen as a bonus, as it will enable you to uncover *ActRaiser's* secrets over one long weekend. With today's RPGs being bogged down with lengthy cutscenes and monotonous levelling up, finding a game like *ActRaiser* that can be completed so quickly is truly refreshing. The relative speed with which you can play through *ActRaiser* must be levelled at its six sim sections, as they are extremely simplistic in their execution and require you to do little more than level the surrounding countryside with a selection of different powers (lightning, rain, or later earthquakes) while laying the ground work for your followers to build on and shoot any nearby monsters. While your subjects continually pester you with requests, most

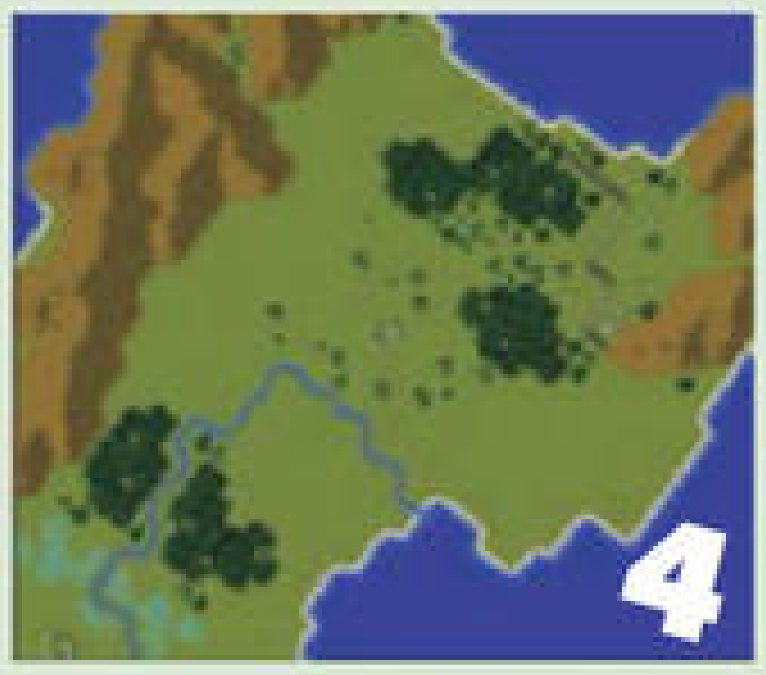
REMEMBER WHEN?

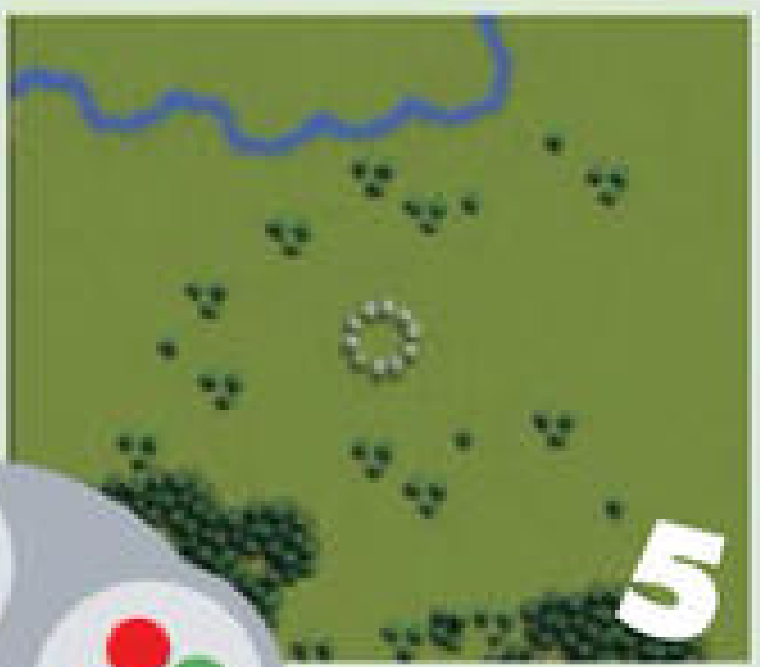
Some of the most jaw-dropping moments in *ActRaiser* occur when you're about to enter a new battle. Beginning high above the Mode 7 landscape you zoom towards the ground, which continually rotates on your approach. As your descent continues, a slowly building orchestra sounds off in the background. It's a breathtaking scene that still impresses today.

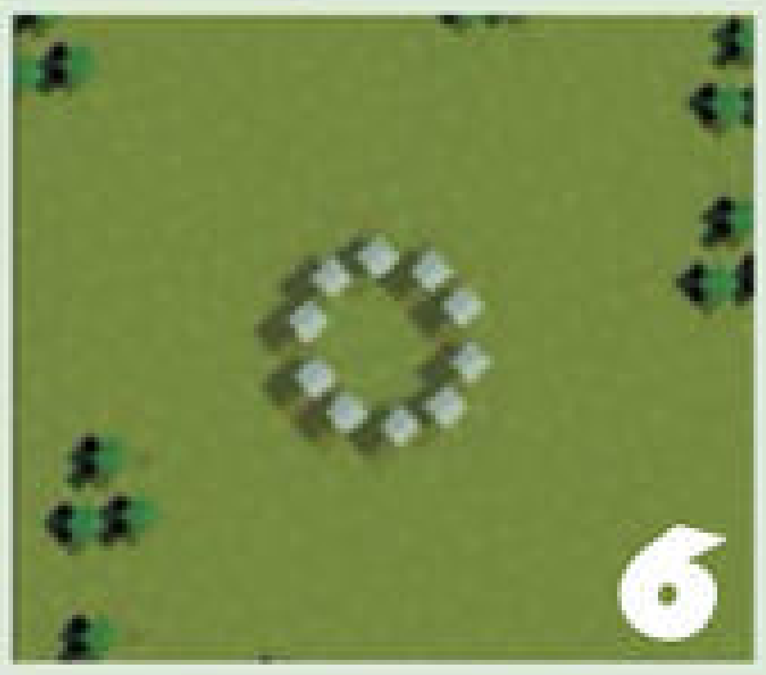


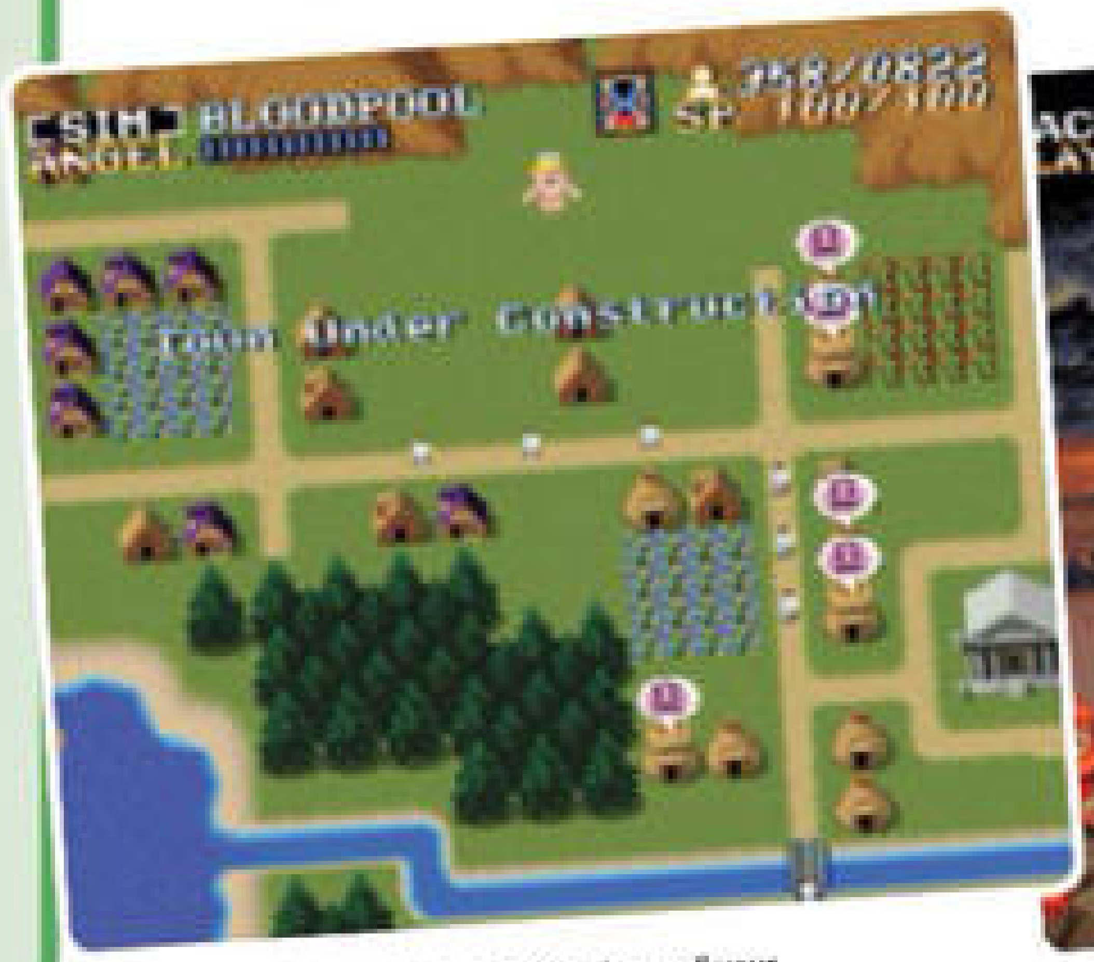




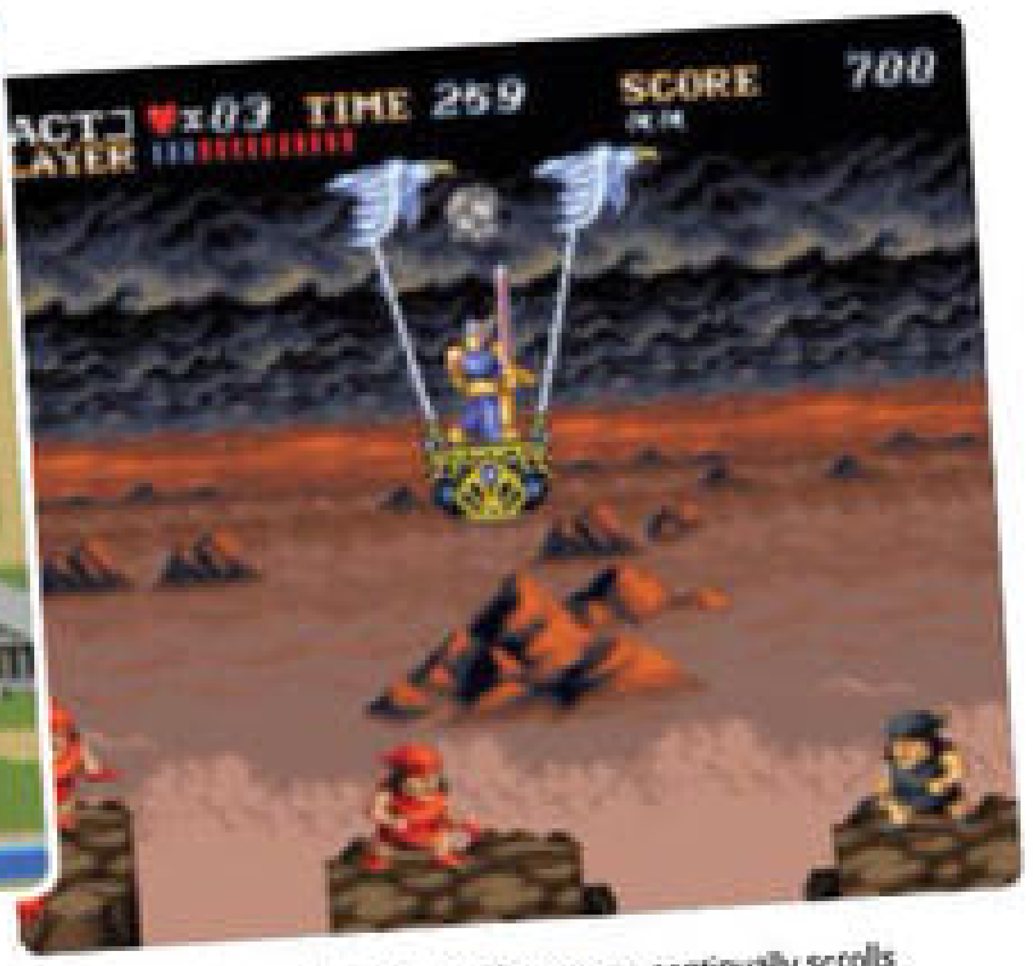




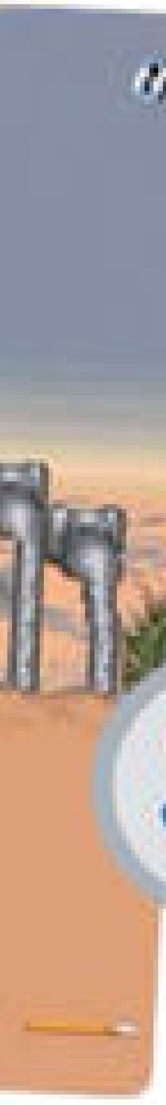




» [SNES] When things aren't going well your followers will soon give you a sign.



» [SNES] Now this is tricky. The screen continually scrolls forward, so you really need to be on your guard.

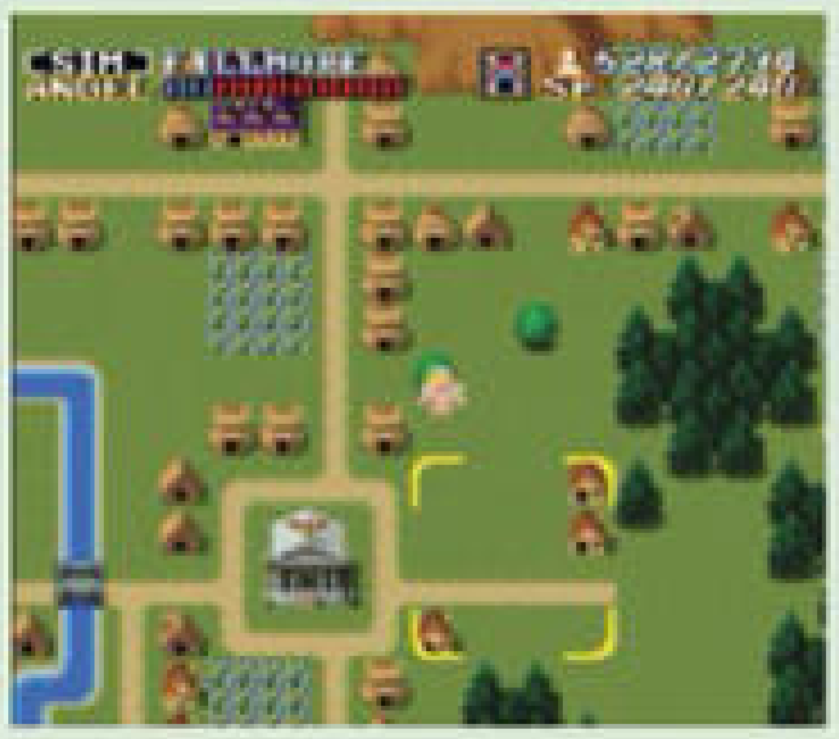


LOCATION, LOCATION

ActRaiser's environments are many and varied…

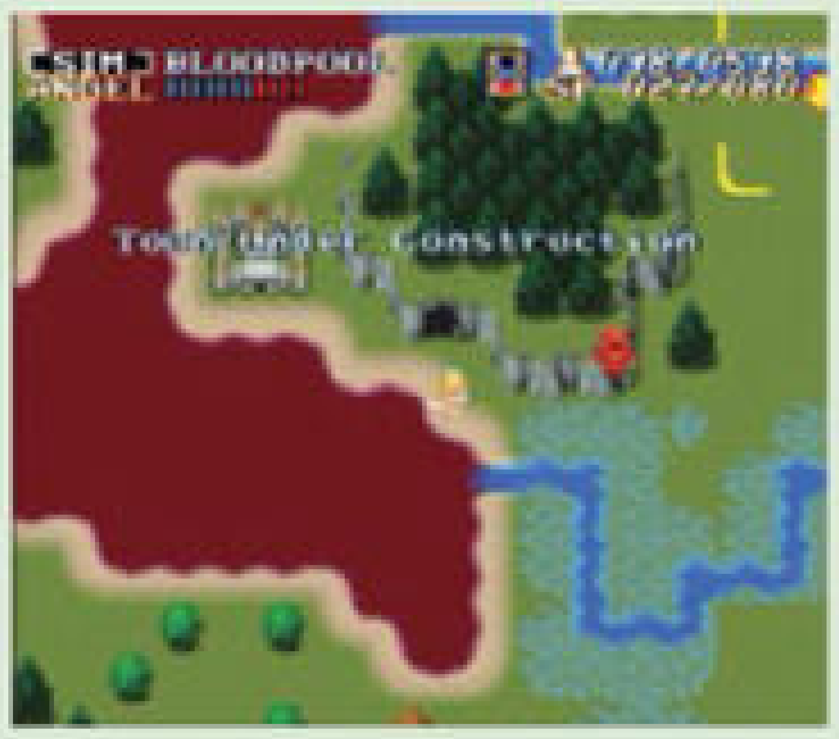
FILLMORE

Your quest begins in the delightful land of Fillmore. While most of its countryside consists of rolling pastures there are a fair few trees that make building roads difficult. A quick blast of lightning soon solves this particular problem though.



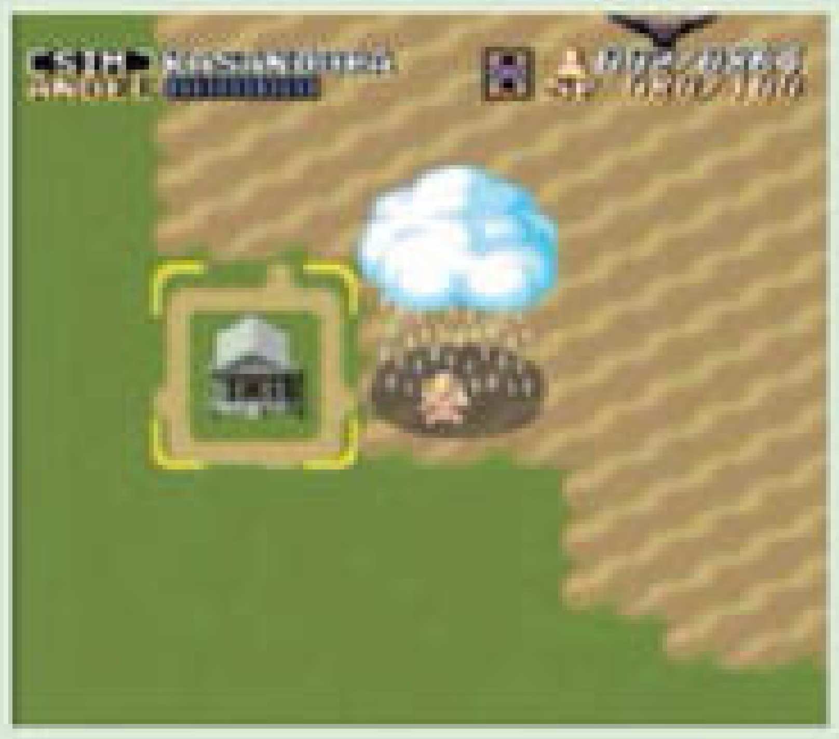
BLOODPOOL

The swamp infested Bloodpool gets its name from the deep red of its largest lake. You discover that the large expanse of water is being poisoned by monsters, but how are you going to stop them and restore the lake to its former glory?



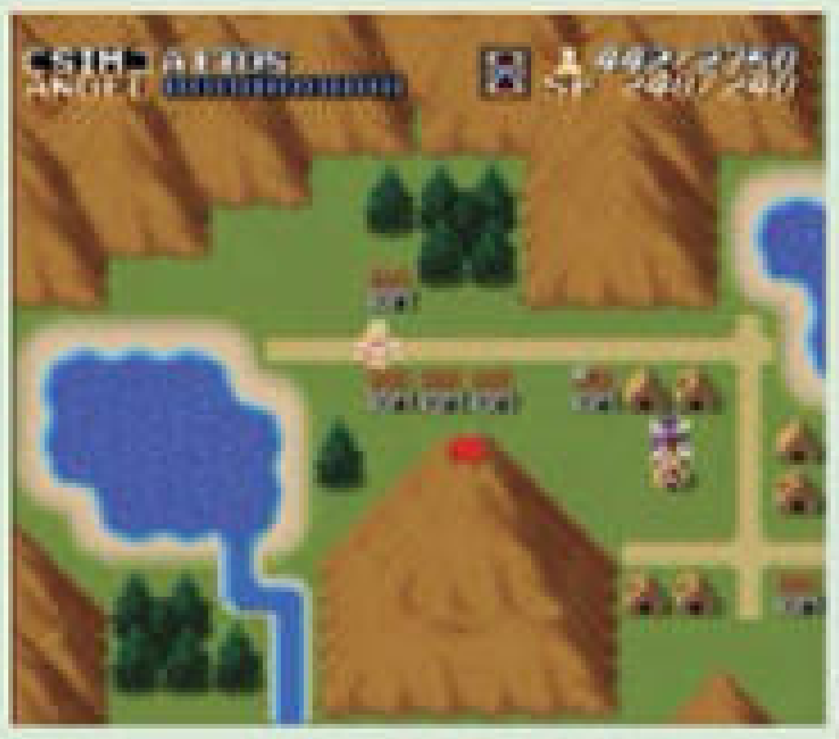
KASANDORA

Living in Kasandora appears impossible as it's filled with a huge expanse of inhospitable desert. Fortunately, you can summon up large quantities of rain to flush most of it away, meaning that your followers can soon rebuild new homes.



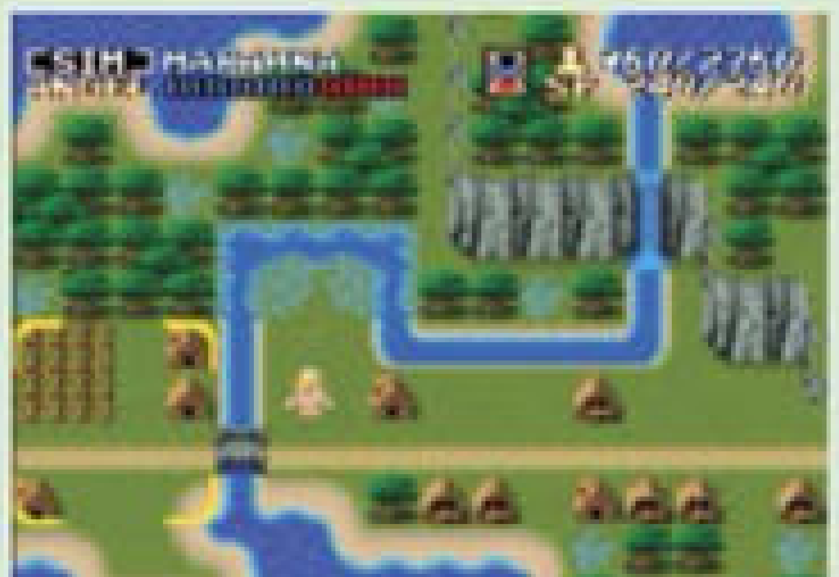
AITOS

The region of Aitos is similar to Kasandora in that it requires a lot of effort to enable your followers to live there. Use gusts of wind to keep their windmills turning and they will reward you with the wool they gather from the region's sheep.



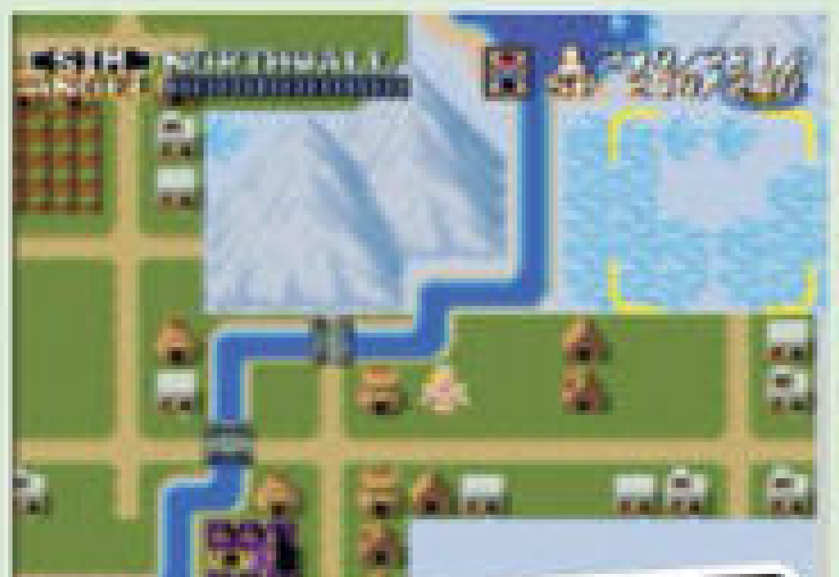
MARAHNA

A humid jungle that requires plenty of lightning blasts to destroy the island's many trees. You'll also be required to create an earthquake later in the game, so make sure you don't build too many homes near the targeted area…



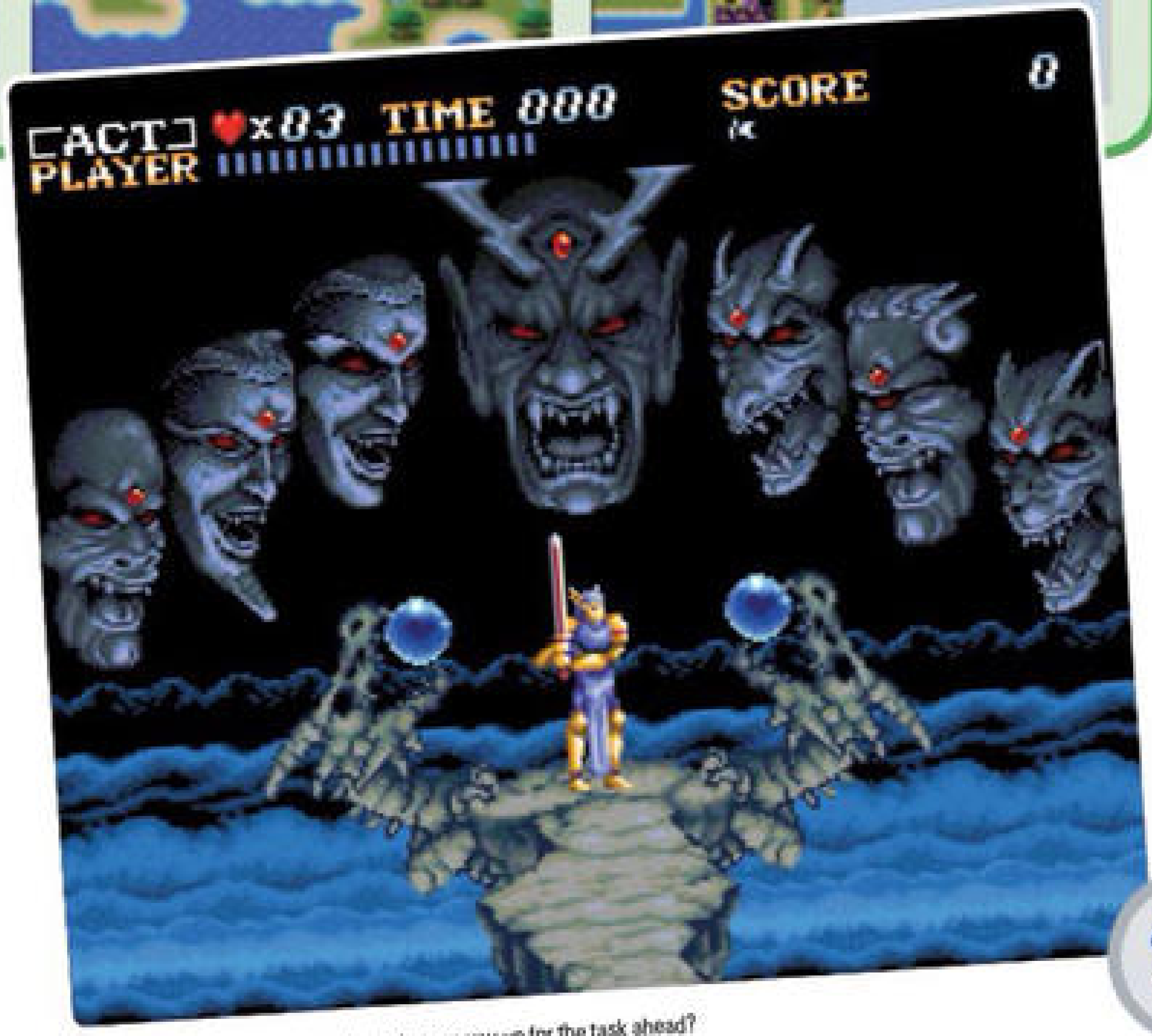
NORTHWALL

The biggest problem you'll have at Northwall is that it's too cold for many of your villagers to work in. Surely one of your other countries has a way of keeping them warm… It also features one of the hardest stages in the game.



tasks require you to do little more than travel to an adjacent town and pick up an item that your current villagers are unable to create. Of course, with *ActRaiser* straddling two vastly different genres, neither of them were going to be as complex as a game that focused on a single playing style, so Quintet's linear approach can be somewhat justified. It also means that you can quickly race through the town building sections and return to the side-scrolling hack-fests – it should come as no surprise to learn that Quintet includes a "Professional Mode" that cuts out the sim building entirely and simply allows you to play all 12 of *ActRaiser*'s glorious levels.

Even after 23 years *ActRaiser* retains a refreshing uniqueness that enables it to stand proud against many of the SNES's better-known titles. The fact that many of you are unlikely to have played it the first time around should help make its discovery all the sweeter.



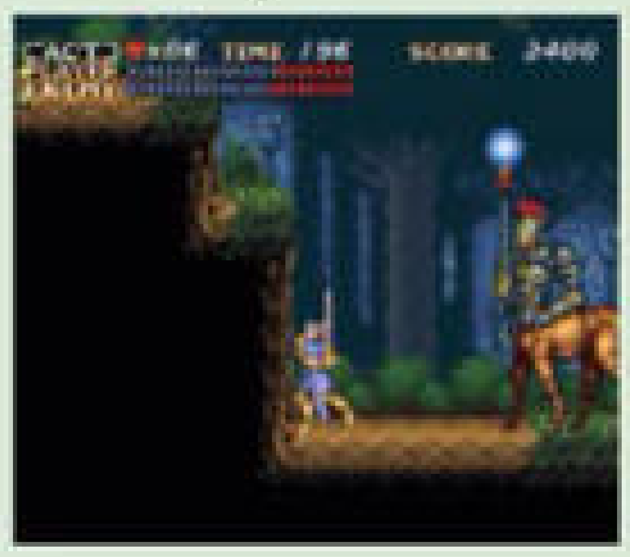
» [SNES] The final showdown, but are you up for the task ahead?

BEASTLY BOSSES

Just a few of *ActRaiser*'s bosses and how to defeat them

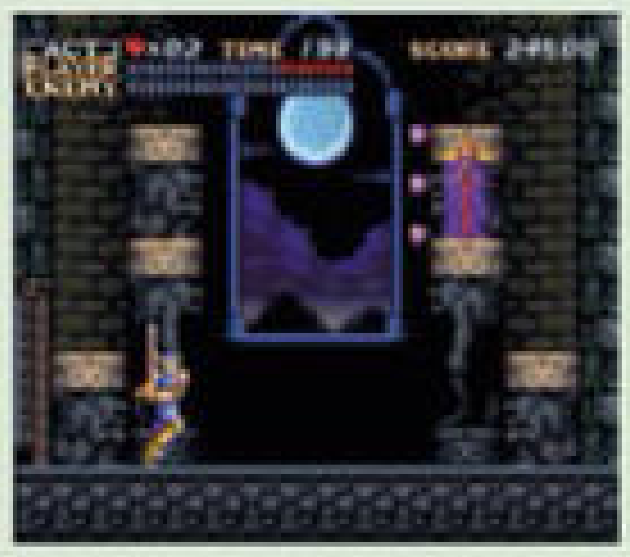
CENTAUR KNIGHT

The first boss may be huge but he's easy to kill. Duck under his attack and then get in a quick counter hit. When he fires his lightning attack, run to the far right of the screen.



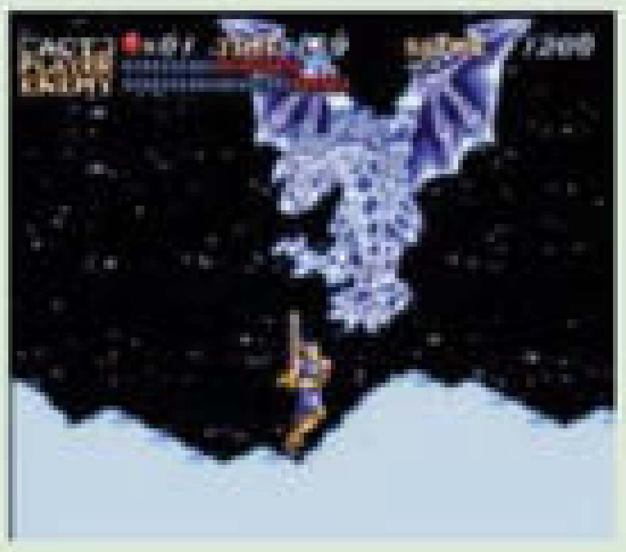
WIZARD

Stay at a distance to avoid his fire. When he lands on the bottom right, run over to score four hits on him. He'll turn into a werewolf, but just constantly hit him and he'll keel over.



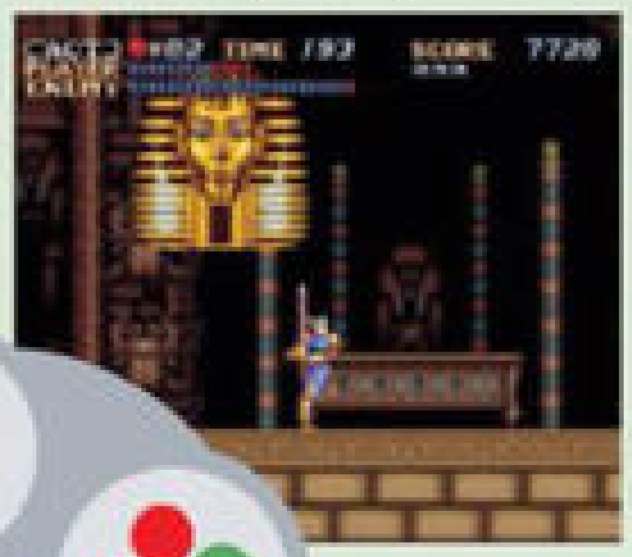
ICE WYVERN

Wait for him to fire ice at you then run away from him. Eventually he'll come to a stop, so manoeuvre behind him to get in a few solid strikes. Rinse, lather, and repeat…



GOLDEN PHARAOH

His eyes will indicate when he drops down, so stay out of his way. Once he's landed you can hit him and all you have to do is jump over the laser he fires and repeat the process.



IMPORT ONLY

INFO

- **PUBLISHER:** TNN
- **DEVELOPER:** ATELIER DOUBLE
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** SUPER FAMICOM
- **ALSO ON:** DS
- **GENRE:** PUZZLE/PLATFORMER
- **RELEASED:** 1994
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £60+ ($90+)

GAME ORIGIN

- **COUNTRY:** JAPAN
- **POPULATION:** 127,433,494
- **CAPITAL:** TOKYO
- **NATIONAL LANGUAGE:** JAPANESE
- **CURRENCY:** YEN
- **TIME ZONE:** GMT +9

» **CO-ORDINATES:** 35°41' N 139°46' E

EVOLUTION OF THE GENRE

▲ Retro

BIONIC COMMANDO
RELEASED:
1987

The granddaddy of the grappling platformer, *Bionic Commando* is more action-orientated than *Umihara Kawase*, and features soldiers in place of fish and a bionic telescopic arm instead of a lively fishing rod.

▼ Modern

BIONIC COMMANDO
RELEASED:
2009

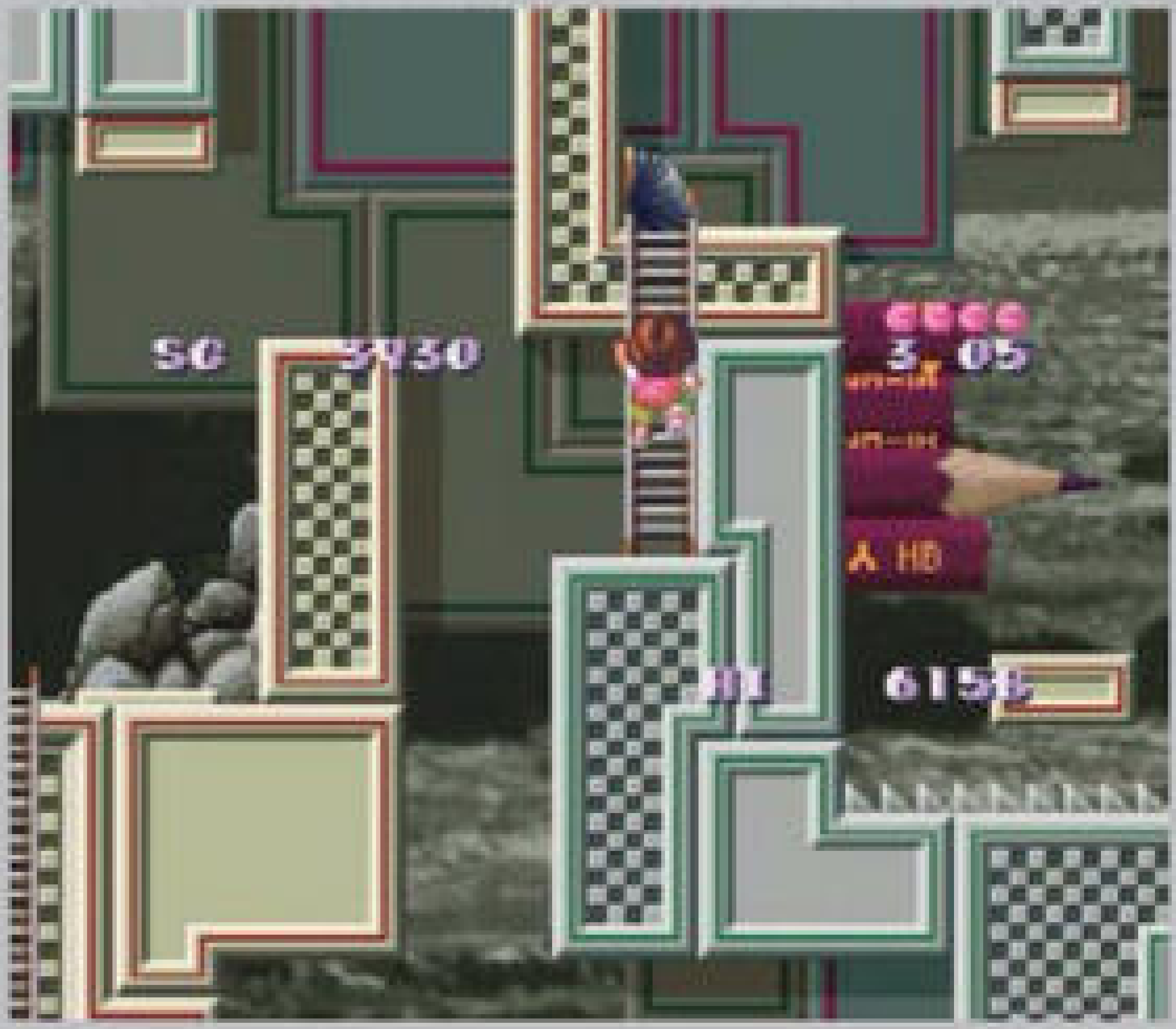
This superb 3D reboot of the *Bionic Commando* franchise nails the thrill of swinging and blasting through the air brilliantly. Enjoyable and challenging, it also has a rocking soundtrack, too. Track this awesome version down and play it until you love it like we do.

UMIHARA KAWASE

» We cast our line into the deep sea of import titles and pluck out Umihara Kawase, a Super Famicom platformer that tastes like Bionic Commando cooked in delicious Spirited Away batter

Developed by a little-known studio and released sole-ly (that's it for the fish puns, promise) in Japan, *Umihara Kawase* has become something of a cult Super Famicom title, thanks to the internet. Indeed, you might have seen its name crop up on a few retro gaming sites about obscure SNES gems, or even the odd best import games list. It's the Super Famicom platformer with the fishing rod-brandishing schoolgirl and giant fish patrolling its stages.

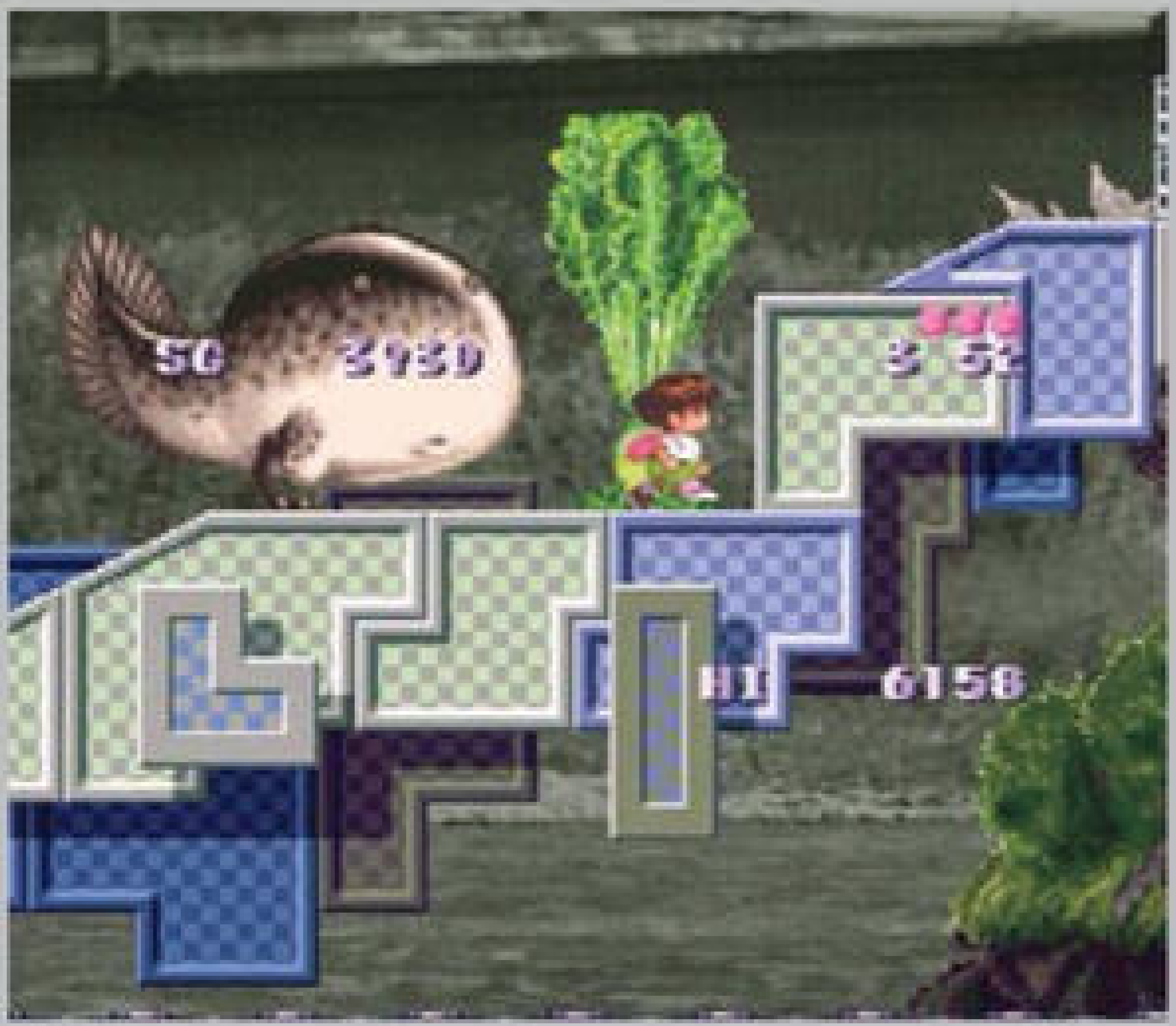
The premise of *Umihara Kawase* isn't all that clear. In fact if we had to come up with one to best give explanation to its zany gameplay, we'd say it's probably about a teenage girl with the world's most elasticised fishing rod, experiencing a rather nasty night terror after stuffing a pongy prawn sandwich down her throat. The consequent dream/nightmare/bizarre hallucination episode that she experiences finds her having to work through a series of whimsical stages to reach exit doors positioned in annoying-to-reach areas.



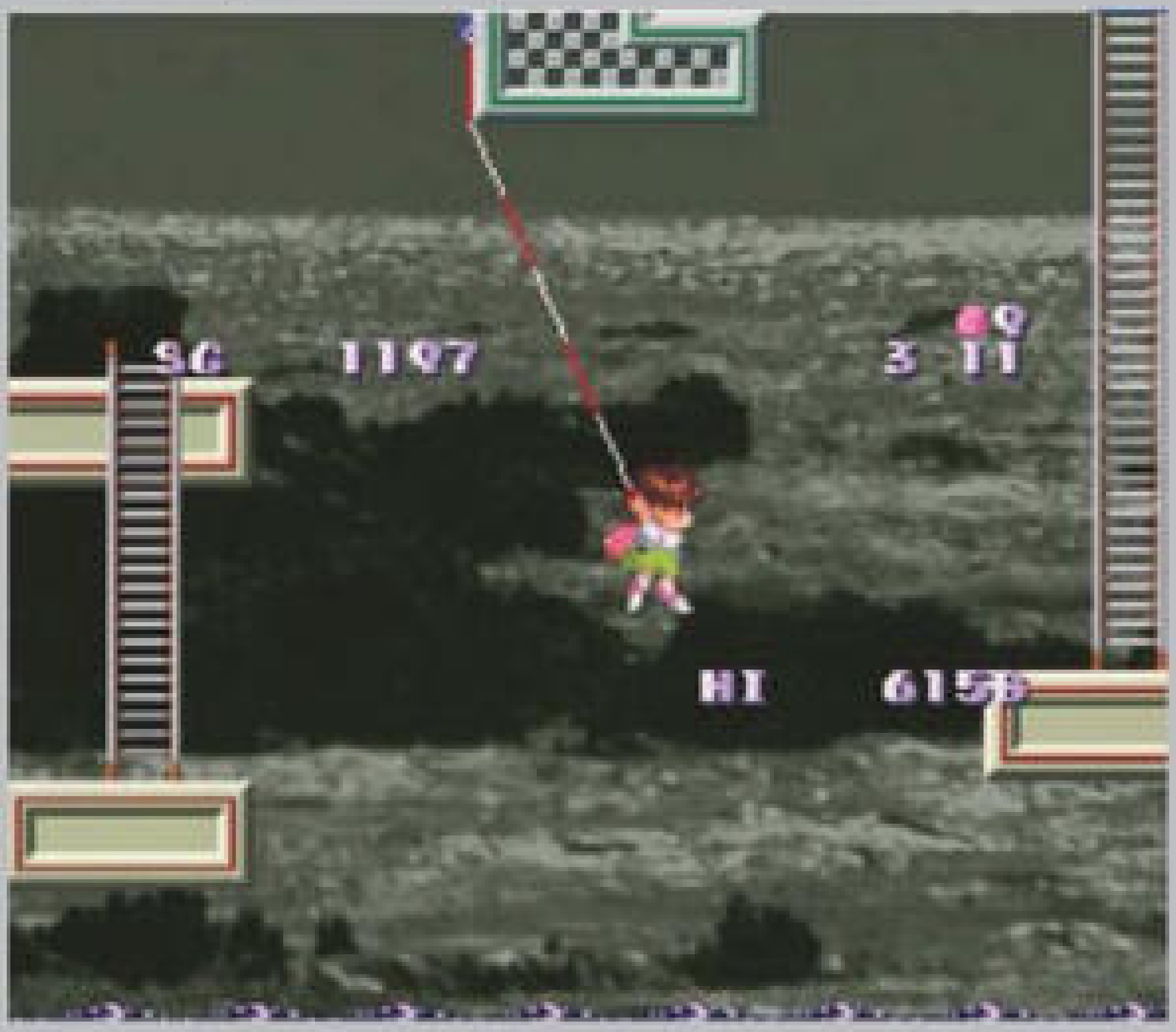
[SNES] The world of *Umihara Kawase* is a bit bonkers, and is made up of sea creatures, black and white photographs, and even giant school stationary.

With levels featuring plenty of long gaps and death pits between platforms, you use the fishing rod as a grappling hook to get around. By aiming the rod with the D-pad, you can swing and manoeuvre yourself around the level. You can also pull yourself up by reeling in the line or lower yourself by letting it out. It's a mechanic that works well and is where pretty much all the appeal of *Umihara Kawase* comes from, but it does take a bit of practice to get the hang of, so prepare for a bit of wrestling with the controls initially as you battle to get yourself in the precise position needed to help you continue with your journey. And to make matter worse, the levels are occupied by large fish, eels and crustaceans that just seem to appear and disappear at random. You can hit these enemies with your fishing hook to temporarily stun them, and in this stasis they become safe to reel in and stick in your pink rucksack.

Despite its steep learning curve, those moments when you do perform an impressive feat of fishing line swinging to make it to the section of the stage you

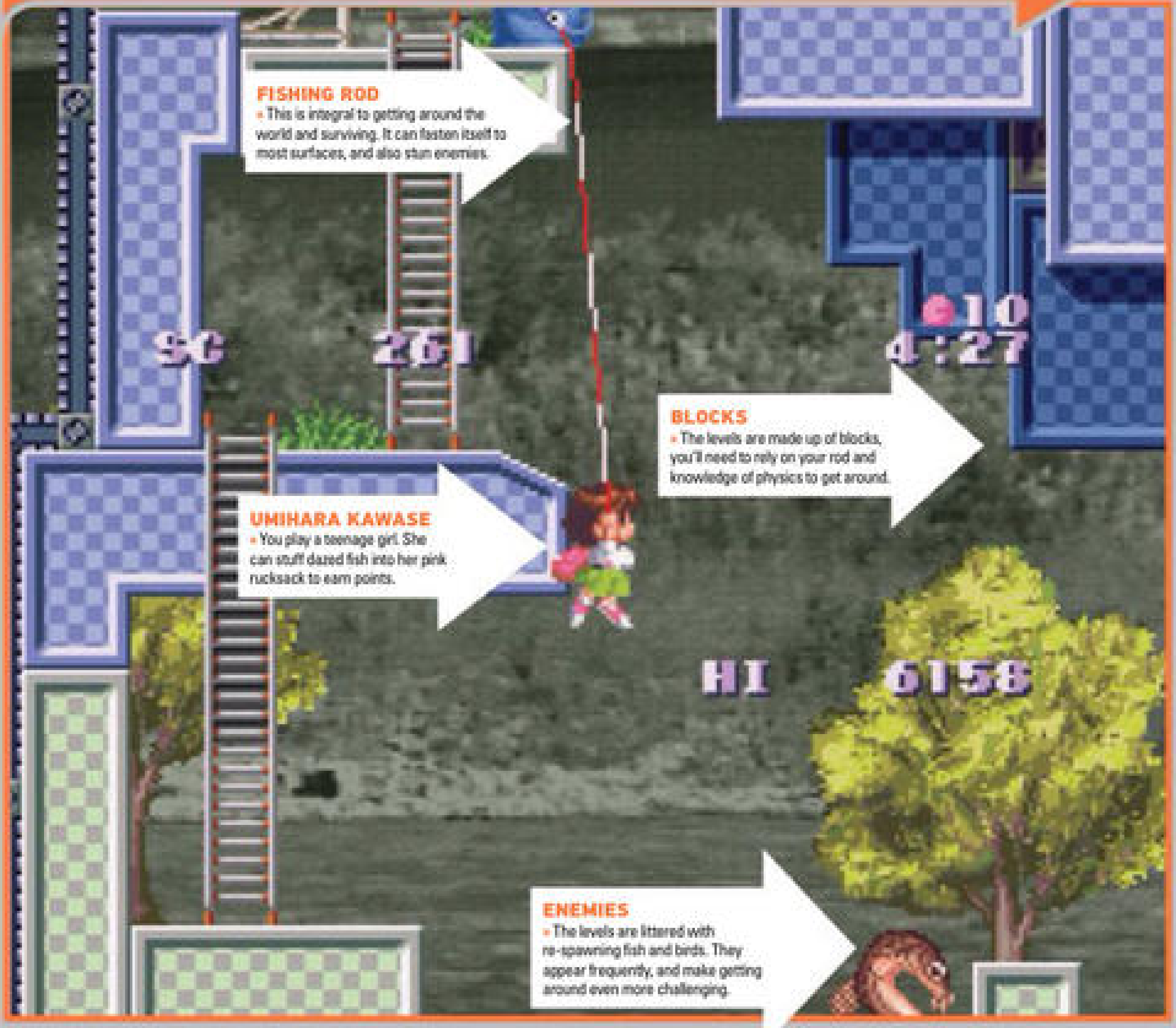


» [SNES] The puzzle stages are interrupted by occasional boss encounters. Sadly this fish is too large to stun so you'll need to come up with another way to reach the exit.



» [SNES]There are loads of different rod techniques you can use to get around, and completing the game will require mastery of them all.

GO DEEPER A Fishing Lesson



FISHING ROD
» This is integral to getting around the world and surviving. It can fasten itself to most surfaces, and also stun enemies.

BLOCKS
» The levels are made up of blocks, you'll need to rely on your rod and knowledge of physics to get around.

UMIHARA KAWASE
» You play a teenage girl. She can stuff dazed fish into her pink rucksack to earn points.

ENEMIES
» The levels are littered with re-spawning fish and birds. They appear frequently, and make getting around even more challenging.

> “It's the Super Famicom platformer with the fishing rod-brandishing schoolgirl”

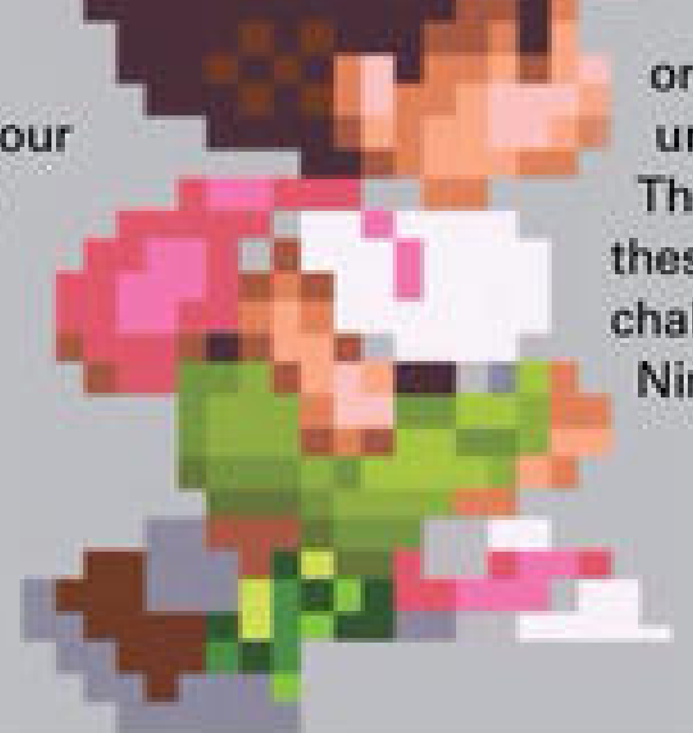
want is when the brilliance of *Umihara Kawase* comes to the surface. There's a real sense of achievement felt whenever you finish a level. Also, because of the way in which the stages are designed, and the fact your line will fasten itself to pretty much any surface, there are multiple ways to finish them too. Moreover, there are also a nice variety of clever little line-casting techniques to master too, and as you make progress you learn that later levels have been designed in such a way that you will need to rely on them all.

Though the sprites look nice and detailed, *Umihara Kawase* certainly isn't the prettiest game to grace the Super Famicom. If we're honest, its world is actually a little on the bland side. Backgrounds are made up of badly digitised black and white photographs of deserted beaches and rocky cliff bottoms, while levels are constructed from simple blocks that would look more at home in an 8-bit puzzler. With that said, it's not like you've really got time to take in the sights anyway, as the environment is just too dangerous to avert your eyes from your character for even a second.

Despite never migrating from Japanese shores, *Umihara Kawase* was popular enough to receive a sequel. *Umihara Kawase Shun*, which appeared on PlayStation, gave the series a bit of a makeover while its gameplay was leveraged more towards the puzzle feel of the original. It also featured isometric-ish 3D levels, a change that many fans argued made navigating the environment more difficult, and a shorter and thus springier fishing line too. A second edition of the game was also later released that made a few gameplay improvements and subtle changes to the visuals and presentation.

The series then went portable with the release of *Umihara Kawase Portable* on PSP in Japan. Based predominantly on *Shun*, it was developed by Rocket Studio and with no involvement from series creator Kiyoshi Sakai. However, Sakai did return to oversee the release of *Umihara Kawase DS*, an anthology for the DS of both the original *Umihara Kawase* and its sequel *Umihara Kawase Shun*.

If you enjoy your games with a side order of physics-based mechanics, we urge you to seek out *Umihara Kawase*. Though copies aren't cheap to buy these days, it is certainly one of the most challenging and quirky platformers found on Nintendo's 16-bit console.



CAN'T IMPORT? YOU COULD TRY

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY 2: DIDDY'S KONG QUEST

» A challenging platformer with cutesy cartoon visuals and gameplay that requires a bit of brainpower to get around (in this instance deciding when best to use the distinct abilities of Diddy and Dixie), Rare's sequel to *Donkey Kong Country*, which many fans regard as the best in the series, is a tasty red meat alternative to *Umihara Kawase*'s fishy dish.

THE MAKING OF

HARVEST MOON

Hoeing, planting, watering, harvesting and a little bit of courtship. It's all in a day's work for Kim Wild, who tracks down Yasuhiro Wada and talks about the popular farm simulator

There are many videogame franchises that have existed over more than a handful of games, but the vast majority revolve around a main character such as Sonic, Mario, Mega Man and even Solid Snake. Few series survive around a basic idea or concept without having a mascot at the helm, yet this is the case for *Harvest Moon,* which has an ever-changing world of characters in each iteration. It's a peaceful, gentle look at the world of farming that encourages playfulness as much as it does creativity, where danger is an unknown concept and violence is forbidden. If joy and happiness could be bottled, then *Harvest Moon* could become an even greater money-making commodity.

Yasuhiro Wada, creator of *Harvest Moon* and director of the series, first became involved with the videogame industry in Tokyo: "At the time, I thought games would be the cutting edge in entertainment, so I applied to a job ad, and got hired!"

A keen games player in his youth, in particular *The Legend Of Zelda,* Wada takes considerable inspiration from Nintendo's output: "I wouldn't say there is always someone who inspires me for each game, but as a creator I have great respect for

HARVEST MOON
CONTINUE
START
HOW TO PLAY

IN THE KNOW

- **» PUBLISHER:** NATSUME
- **» DEVELOPER:** PACK-IN-VIDEO
- **» PLATFORM:** SNES
- **» RELEASED:** 1996

Will Wright and Shigeru Miyamoto. However, when I get set to come up with game ideas, I make sure to always take concepts from things that aren't related to games."

After spending years working on PC Engine games as a production assistant, Wada would begin a draft for *Bokujo Monogatari* (*Ranch Story*) that originated from living in the countryside. "I wanted to make something that hadn't existed before," he says. "That was the source of my inspiration. At the time, it seemed like games were all about fighting or competition. So, I decided to make a game without fighting and without competition."

Farming, however, is just a small part of *Harvest Moon*'s charm. You have a life to develop, as well as having to attend to your expanding lifestock. From befriending the locals, attending events, expanding your home, there's always something to involve you, including the prospect of love. "The original concept included not just the farming element, but also the element of life simulation, so romance and marriage was not something we could really leave out," explains Wada. "In the concept you could choose from several partners, and if you fulfilled certain conditions you could get married and have a child. This was included in the concept from a very early stage in the development of the first *Harvest Moon*."

» [SNES] This is what happens when you mix your drinks at the office party.

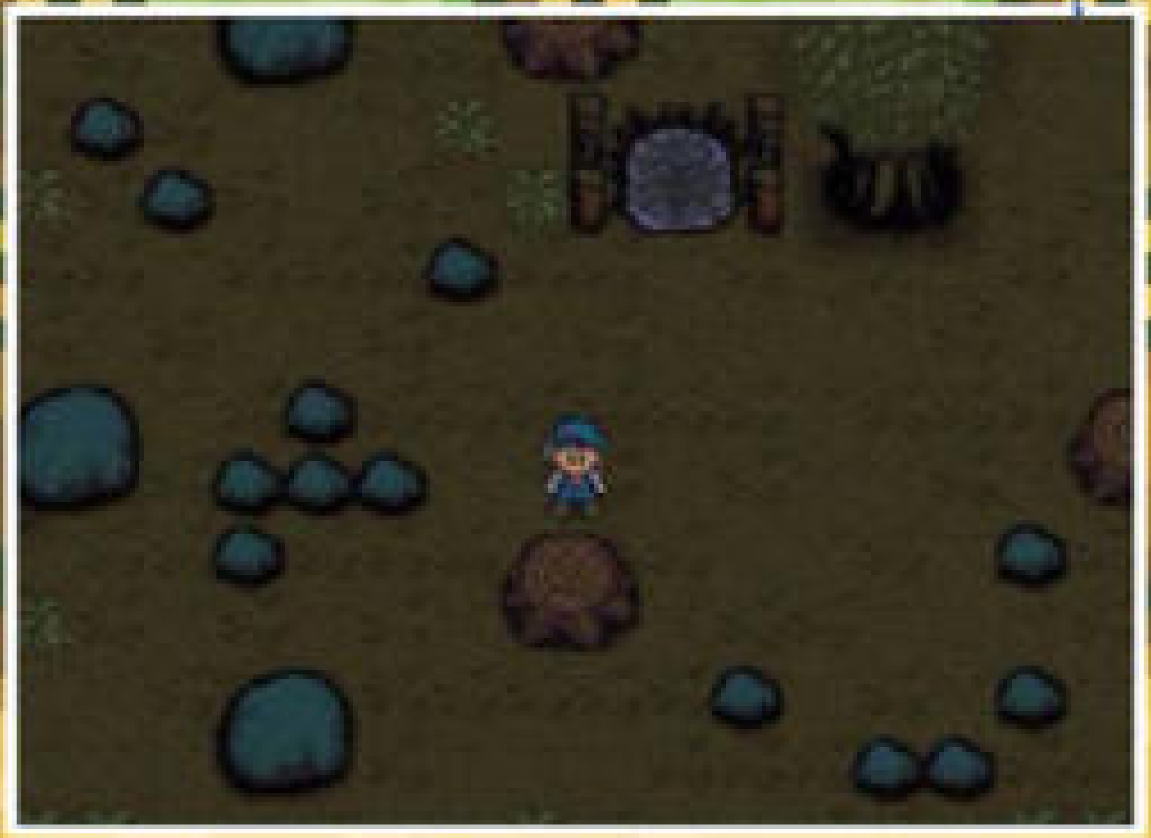
> **"I decided to make a game without fighting and without competition"**

While a certain amount of research went into the factual side of farming, many elements were discarded in favour of fun. "When we first started developing *Harvest Moon*, of course we had to research that side, but the concept of *Harvest Moon* was never to be a 'farming' simulation. Instead, it is a 'country living' simulation," says Wada. "As we designed the game, we greatly simplified it, so there are some things that will feel a bit different from reality. We wanted to create a world reminiscent of alpine Europe, sprinkled with machines and inventions and fantasy such as the Harvest Goddess. Quite simply, our main reason for this was that we felt this type of world would be attractive, but this is a fantasy world where there are no predators to devour your livestock, and breeding is done with potions."

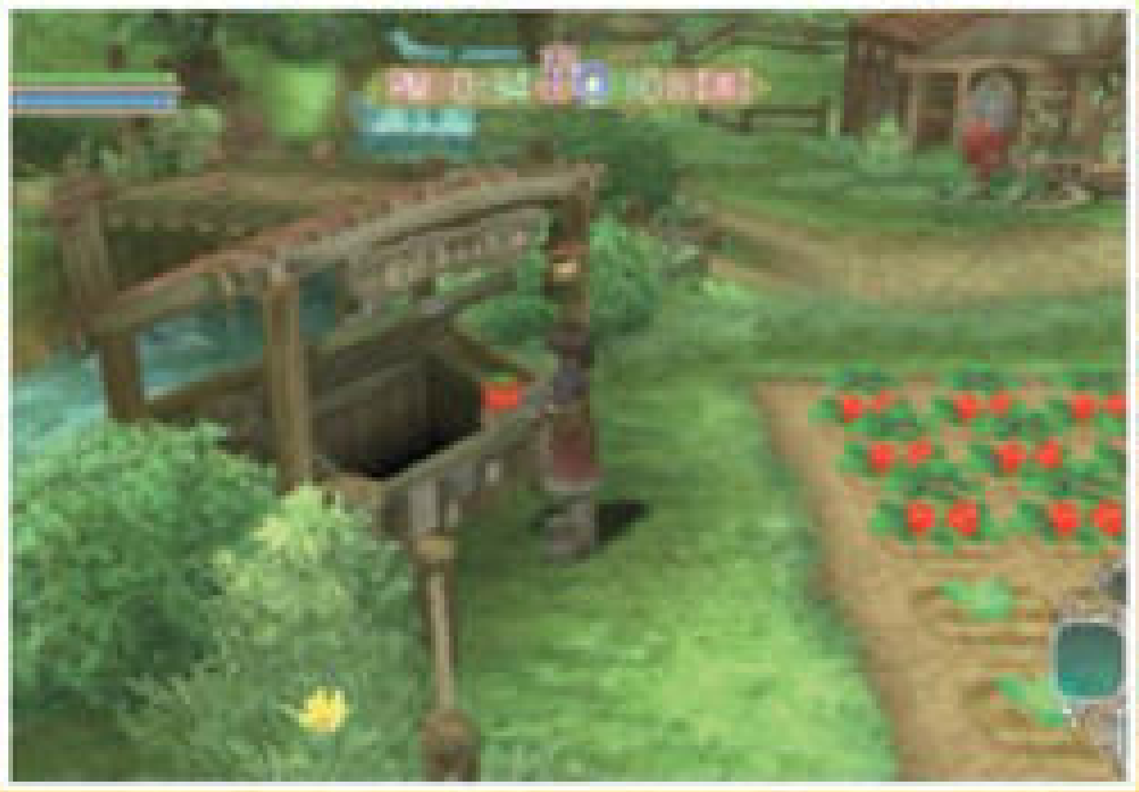
What makes *Harvest Moon* all the more appealing is the anime and fairytale style it has to its appearance. "I created this style while debating with the designer," explains Wada. "I decided that I wanted to create a world that was a mix of European alpine dairy land and a bizarre world like that of Akira Toriyama's *Dr Slump*." While huge elements of the game's style do get written down, the overall design comes about through an interchange of ideas: "We do indeed map out our ideas, but we have more documents than anything like a blueprint. The designers and programmers work from those documents and exchange ideas. Finally, we create the final look of the game based on the designer's ideas." This process also applies to the creation of the characters that are so engaging to interact with: "We decide on certain character types at an early stage, and the concept designer fleshes them out from there. An example would be a 'sister-type with spectacles', or a 'poster girl for the pub'. It's quite vague, but we try to avoid having these types overlap as we sketch them out."

For all its ideals, the development of *Harvest Moon* itself ran into considerable difficulties. The external developer that helped with production went bankrupt, while the main team faced major restructuring. "The first *Harvest Moon* took us three and a half years," recalls Wada. "Two years into it, our ten-man development team was disbanded once, and only the main members of

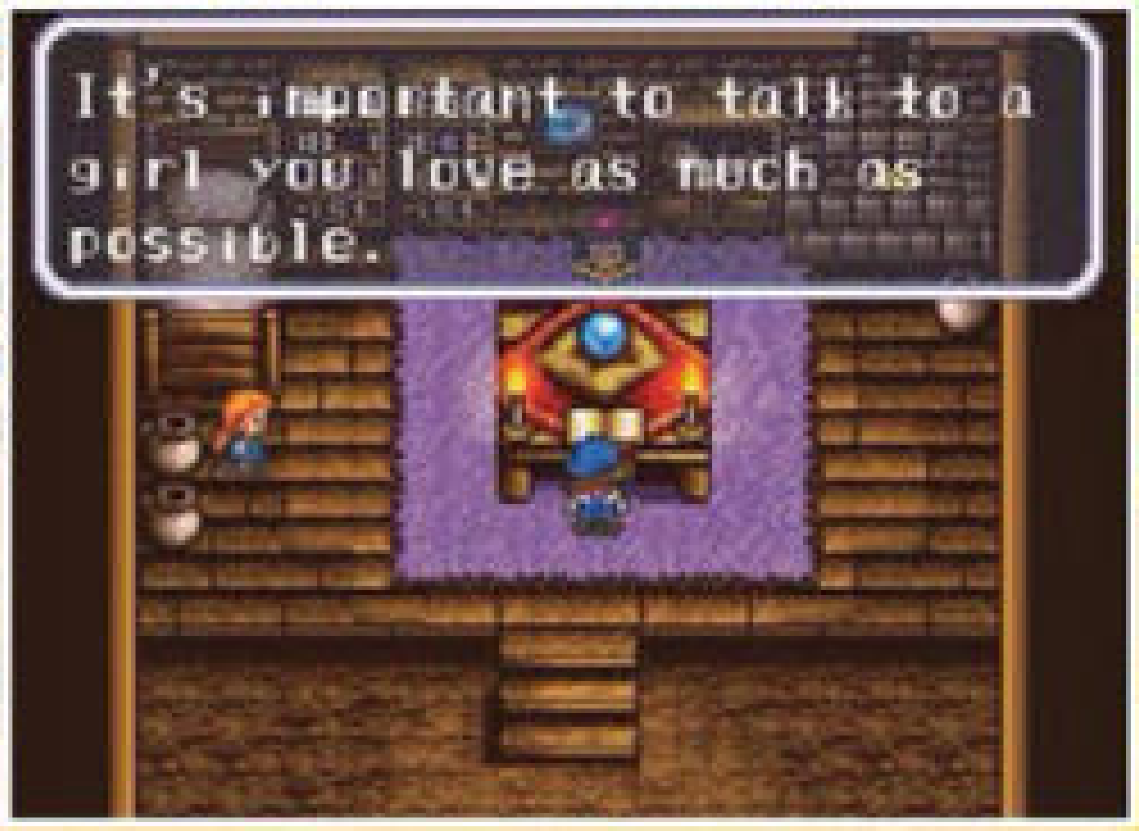
» [SNES] Fishing is a useful way to earn extra money while waiting for crops to grow.



» [SNES] When you first get the farm, there is a lot of debris to sort through.



» [Wii] *Rune Factory Frontier* on the Wii is a new change in direction for the series and is a fantastic addition to the franchise.



It's important to talk to a girl you love as much as possible.

» [SNES] Sound advice for courting the ladies. Regular gifts also help.

that team stayed on. In the end we finished it up with an incredibly small team of just those three."

When it came to the release of the game, the title changed from *Ranch Story* to the now-familiar *Harvest Moon*. Although the release of the game in Europe came quite late into the Super Nintendo's lifespan, with it hitting our shores in 1998, it still managed to build up a following and planted the seeds for the franchise to grow. Not only did it become a hit among players, but it also went on to receive accolades from the media, showering it with praise for its unique style.

"Initially in Japan we only sold about 20,000," says Wada, "but we got some good reviews and word spread. In the end we broke 100,000 sales. The game was then localised for the US and EU, and went on to sell just as well in those territories." The limited print run of the SNES game means it is highly sought after by collectors, although the four *Harvest Moon* episodes released through Japan's Satellaview satellite modem service for the Super Famicom in 1996 are the most collectable and elusive ones of all.

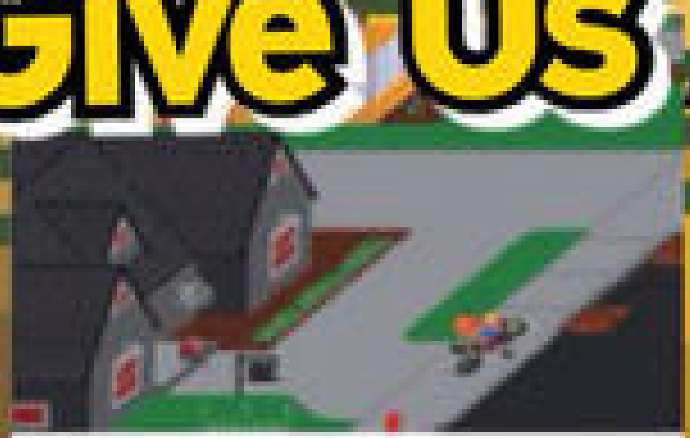
As a concept, the series has progressed significantly, yet there are still areas of life that Wada is keen to explore. "At the very beginning I was quite torn between having more 'real' elements such as divorce and predation," he explains. "Also, I'd like to beef up some of the simulation elements such as the development you see in *Island Of Happiness* and *Magical Melody*. That's something I'd like to make a reality."

One of the main difficulties for each game, particularly for Europe, is the aspect of translation, as Wada explains: "It takes six months to a year, depending on the volume of text. It is especially difficult to make the European version because we localise into many languages. I think we will be able to streamline the process as we've become more experienced." It's something that becomes increasingly noticeable between each console release, and explains why it takes so long for us to catch up with America and Japan, while some games in the series don't even make the journey. Infuriating as it is from the perspective of a gamer – Japan is about to experience *Rune Factory 3*, part of the spin-off fantasy series, on the Nintendo DS, while we are only just reaching the second – translating each game is something of an undertaking. Cultural differences are also an area that have to be considered – while the *Harvest Moon* games in Japan think nothing of serving alcohol as refreshments, North American versions of the game have to settle for juice instead.

> **"We wanted to create a world reminiscent of alpine Europe, sprinkled with machines and inventions and fantasy"**

The series has gone from strength to strength, made all the more evident by the fact that there are 19 – yes, really – games released and counting. As a result, the franchise has flourished on multiple consoles, including the N64, PlayStation, PS2, PSP, Game Boy Color, Game Boy Advance, Nintendo DS, GameCube and Wii. While this has meant that it has suffered from over-familiarity, recent entries such as *Rune Factory* on the DS and the Wii have proven that it is still possible to keep the franchise fresh by adding in some new ingredients. *Rune Factory* combines farming with RPG elements that see you battling monsters and

Give Us A Job



PAPERBOY

Have you ever fancied a paper round but didn't like the idea of the exercise or being exposed to rainy weather? Then this is the game for you. With hazards to avoid, subscribers to deliver to, new customers to attract and an obstacle course, can you last all week?

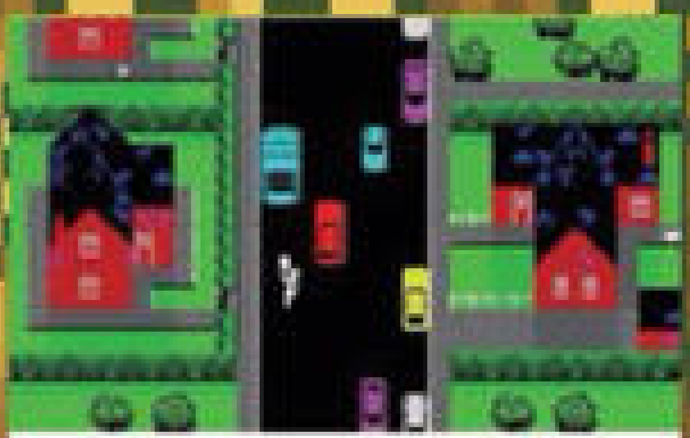
TAPPER

Tom Cruise may have made bartending glamorous in *Cocktail*, but it sure isn't easy. Serve the beers to the punters before they get angry in this arcade classic, and don't forget to clear up the empties when they have finished. If you're lucky, you may even earn yourself a nice tip.

Post man Pat
DELIVERIES 00
SCORE 000000

POSTMAN PAT

Yes, the graphics haven't aged well and the handling isn't as smooth as we remember it, but there is something that's still endearing about this game and the world of *Postman Pat*, and we have spent many a happy hour delivering mail to the villagers. At least this mail man won't go on strike.

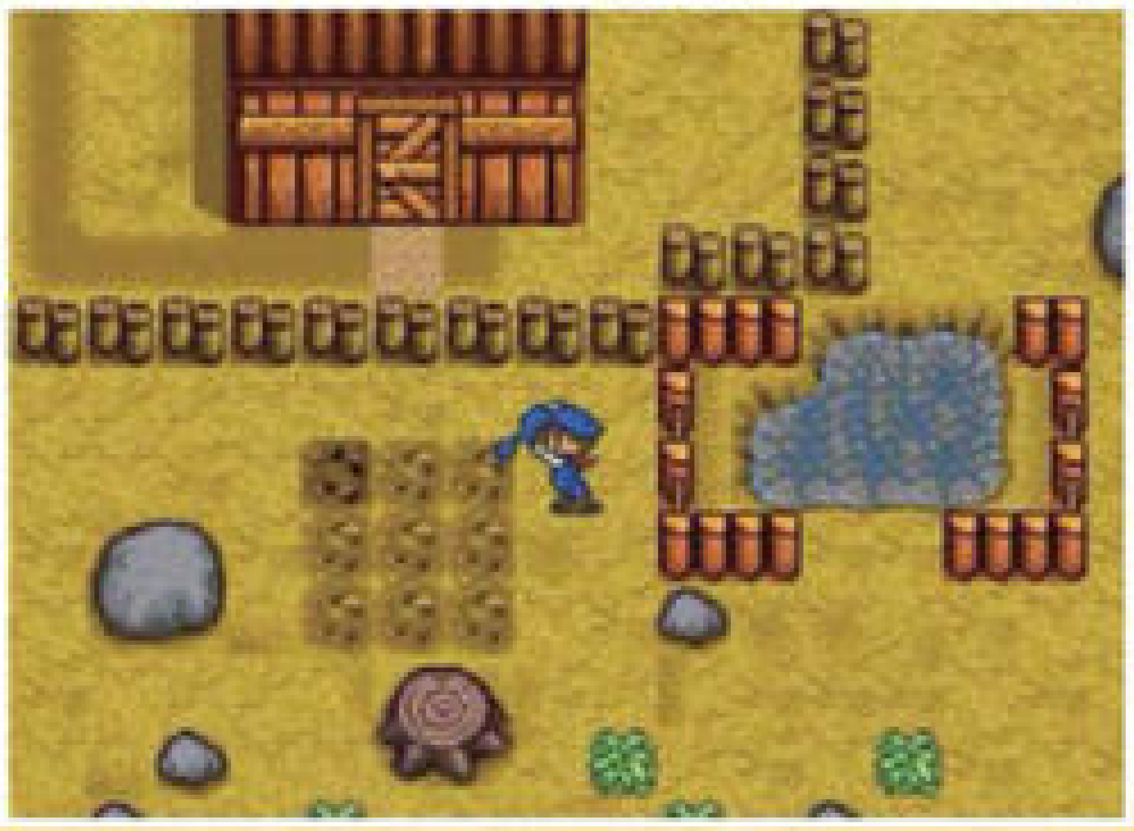


TRASHMAN

It's a rubbish job, but someone's got to do it! At least with this Spectrum classic, an otherwise smelly occupation can be enjoyed from your own home. Collect each dustbin, then empty and replace before time runs out, making sure to avoid dogs and kids, who are out to slow you down.

CRAZY TAXI

Although there have been many games available focused on the world of taxiing, it's this Dreamcast classic that keeps us coming back for more. Chaotic driving, taking short cuts and delivering customers to their destination is the most fun you can have in charge of a speeding vehicle. Taxi!



■ [SNES] All crops need to be watered daily if they are to grow into vegetables.

I'm going to bed now.
Good night.

HARVEST MOON
Another Wonderful Life

finding old relics. The series' change in direction is part of Wada's plan to prevent the quality of the gameplay dipping. "*Harvest Moon* is the main pillar of our business," he affirms, "but if we relied too much on it there would be a chance that the quality would decline. These two titles came about from an idea to let some important game creators make use of the *Harvest Moon* system, and thereby achieve a balance between the creative and business aspects while maintaining the quality of the series and spreading out releases."

Of all the *Harvest Moon* games that exist, though, surely Wada has a favourite? "I don't have my heart set on any one platform, but personally I am most fond of *Harvest Moon 64*. I really love *A Wonderful Life*, and more recently, *Animal Parade*, coming to Europe soon."

What is the secret to the series' success? "I don't know," admits the creator. "Of course, I made it with the hope that it would bring happiness to many people, but I honestly didn't think it would last this long. My hunch is that there aren't many other games like it."

The videogame industry has changed considerably since the early days of the Super Nintendo and is something that Wada has come to notice with regret: "Speaking about the industry as a whole, just too much has changed to list it all. Currently, the industry is split between a small number of very hardcore games, and an ocean of too casual games. Anything in between those extremes is going to face difficulties in becoming successful. It's the old problem of the chicken and the egg. I don't know what caused this, but as time goes on, I've seen many publishers merge and small studios have become obsolete. As a result, it has become more difficult to get novel titles made, and the selection available to players has shrunk. It's a very difficult situation." It's a sad fact that has greatly affected developer Natsume, which has had to abandon more original concepts due to financial constraints.

But with so many games currently available and even more in the pipeline, where does Wada feel the future lies? "The future lies in creating the ultimate social simulation, something in which both beginners and veteran players can discover their own pleasure. In order to provide the most enjoyable experience to as many players as possible, there are many problems to overcome. From there, I would like to evolve the series little by little over time." And for the next project? "I wish I could fill you in on all the ideas I'm working on right now, but I really can't tell you just yet," he answers cryptically.

We are confident that regardless of what those ideas prove to be, *Harvest Moon* will forever remain proof of the fact that innocent, non-violent and charming games have a place within an industry that seems intent on filling itself with guns and destruction at every turn.

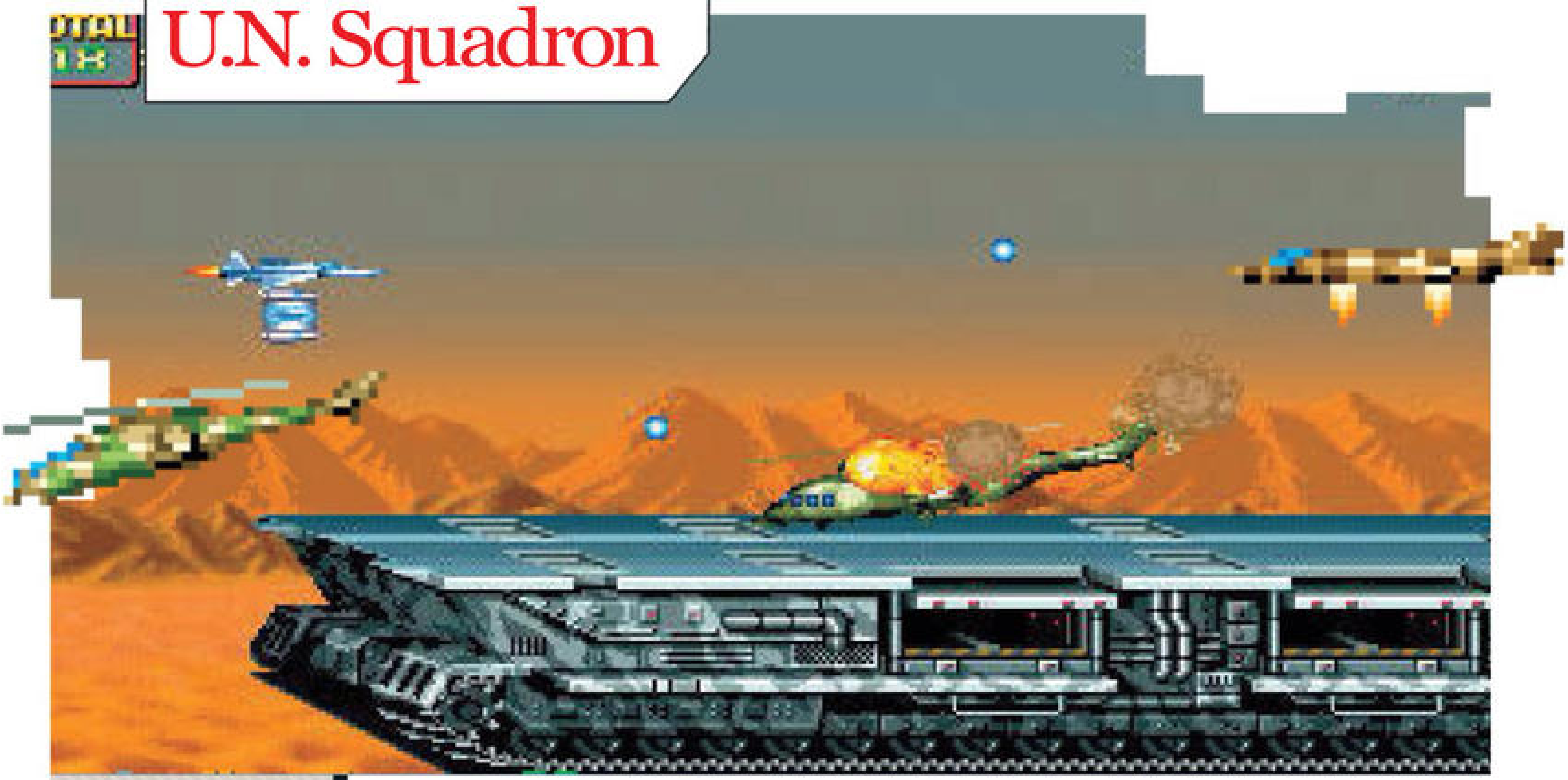
Girl Power

WHEN *HARVEST MOON* became more successful and it appealed to a wider audience, it became apparent that there was one area that was lacking: the ability to be a female farmer. Natsume picked up on this desire and started to release editions catering to this new demographic. The most obvious ones include *More Friends Of Mineral Town* on the Game Boy Advance and *Another Wonderful Life* for the GameCube, which were the originals remoulded so you could play as a girl and have potential husbands. Sadly, none of these titles were released in Europe, and when the GameCube classic *Magical Melody* received a Wii conversion – the original featured both sexes as well as all possible partner choices – the option to play as a female farmer and all that entailed was mysteriously removed. Both gender choices have been re-introduced in *Tree Of Tranquility* and the more recent DS titles.

I won't be dealing livestock
today. They could become
sick outside on a day

Hi. How do you do? I'm the
mayor of this town. It's a
pleasure to meet you.

U.N. Squadron



Stuart Hunt invites you to buckle up, take aim, and take off into the danger zone with Capcom's blistering war-based shooter U.N. Squadron. But before all that, let's begin with a lengthy mission briefing...

In the Eighties, shoot-'em-ups had dominated amusement arcades, and a large proportion had a science fiction theme. A relationship that can be traced to Taito's seminal 1978 smash *Space Invaders*, subsequent iconic arcade releases such as *R-Type* and *Gradius* further helped enrich sci-fi's prominence within the genre, and the two have remained close bedfellows ever since.

With hindsight, it comes as no surprise that many game designers saw sci-fi as such an attractive theme to base their games around; it gave their creativity carte blanche to go wild. Want your bulbous spaceship to do battle against something with a robotic exoskeleton head and the body of an armadillo? In the realm of sci-fi, anything is possible. Therefore, when a more po-faced war-based shooter came along that supplanted the spaceships for fighter planes and Bydo Empires with simply more fighter planes, it understandably looked a little bit dull by comparison.

In 1989 though, Capcom released a war shooter that oozed quality, epic bosses and such high levels of graphic finesse that it was impossible not to take notice. Of course, Capcom already had one successful fleet of plane-based shooters already on its books with its *19XX* series. Debuting in 1984 with the game *1942*, the vertical shooter became one of the developer's most popular arcade genres in the Eighties. It is understandable that Capcom felt it could capture lightning twice.

Capcom adds a little bit of manga magic

Unquestionably helping *U.N. Squadron*'s popularity soar even further was the fact that it was based on a rather splendid manga series titled *Area 88* (which is also *U.N. Squadron*'s Japanese title). Created by the esteemed Kaoru Shintani, it is the Japanese mangaka's most famous work, and is notable for being one of the first Japanese comic books to receive a Western translation.

The series' faintly comic story told the tale of a promising pilot named Shin Kazama whose life takes an unfortunate turn. Enjoying his place as the top student in a prestigious flight school, and dating the pretty daughter of a wealthy airline president, Shin's world is turned upside down after he is fooled by a jealous friend into signing up for three years' service at a mercenary air force base known as Area 88. Deciding to work his socks off so that he can buy his way out of the contract, Shin soon discovers that he is a natural fighter pilot. With his talents not going unnoticed by his bosses, Shin climbs the ranks inside the base, while a battle of moral principles is sparked inside the pilot as he grows to despise all the killing he's forced to do, but understands that it might be his only ticket home.

The game adaptation takes the form of a side-scrolling shoot-'em-up that is split into ten devilishly tricky stages. The underlining mission sees you trying to

▶

Instant Expert

The game is known as *Area 88* in Japan, and is based on a manga series of the same name.

***U.N. Squadron* was** directed by Kihaji Okamoto, who designed *Forgotten Worlds*, *Three Wonders* and *Side Arms - Hyper Dyne*.

Capcom released a sequel, *Carrier Air Wing*, in 1990. Outside of Japan it is known as *US Navy*. It's famous for featuring a character that resembles Sean Connery.

***U.N. Squadron* was** ported to the Spectrum, C64, Amstrad and Amiga. These conversions were developed and published by U.S Gold, except for the Amiga version, which was developed by Tiertex Design Studios.

The *Area 88* Manga series ran between 1979 and 1986 and was one of the first to receive English translation. It was later adapted into a video and anime series.

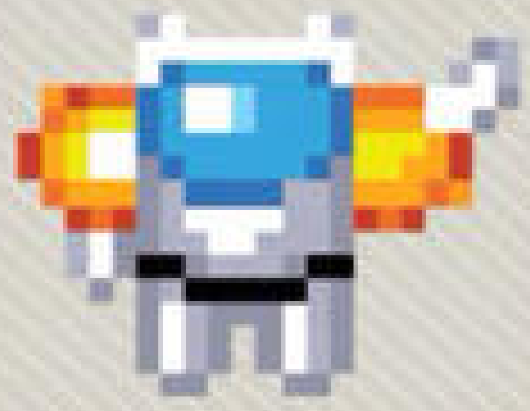
There are a number of differences between the arcade and SNES conversion – different weapons and aircraft and the removal of a two-player mode.

On the SNES the character Mickey Simon is renamed/misspelled 'Mickey Scymon'. Ought to have really been 'Skyman', we think .

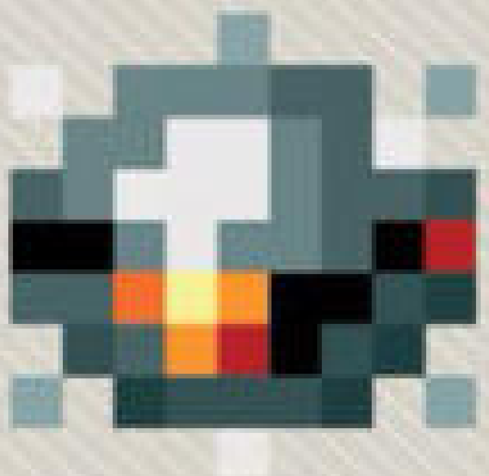
The excellent sequel, *Carrier Air Wing*, was never converted to any console or computer.

Pixel Perfect

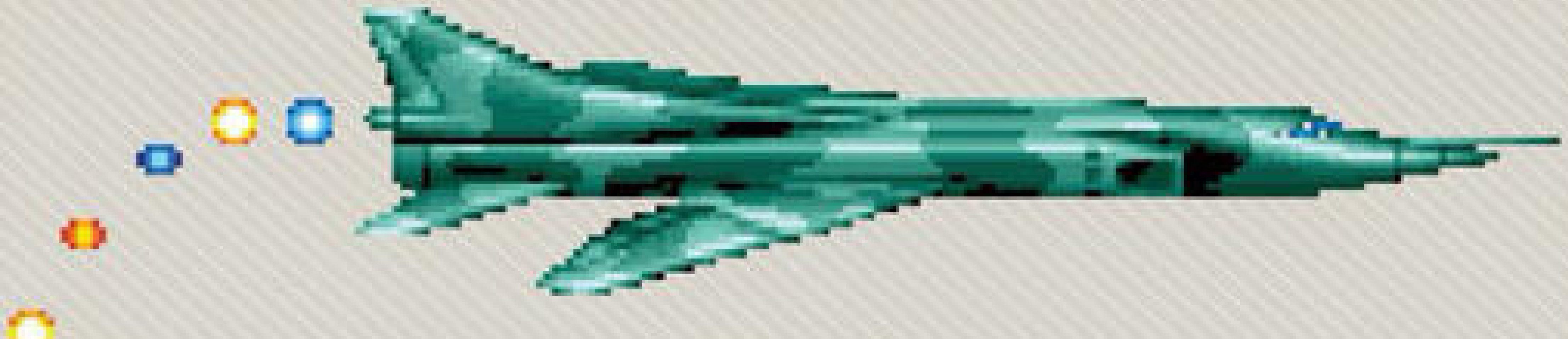
The war machines of U.N. Squadron get shoved up your arsenal…



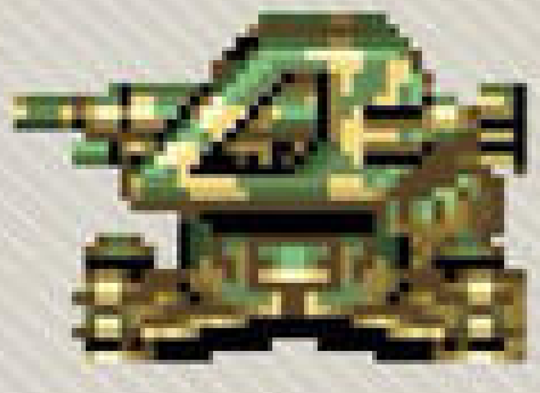
» Pick-up



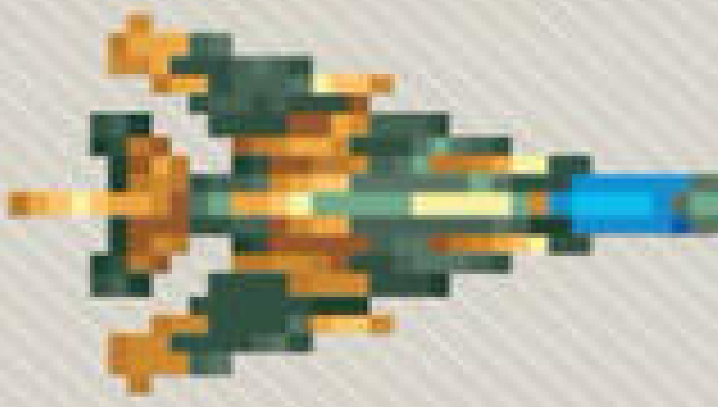
» Air Mine



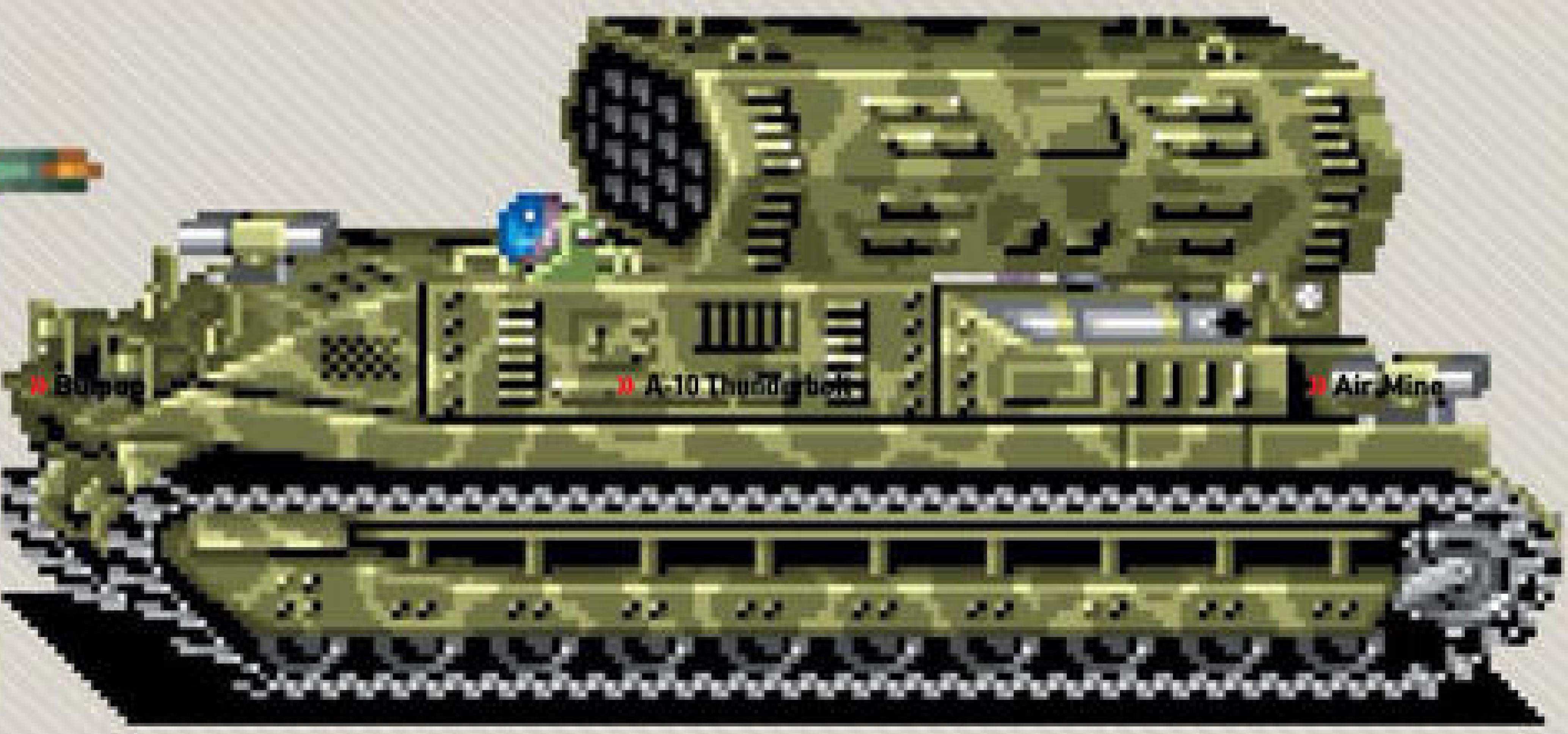
» Large Fighter



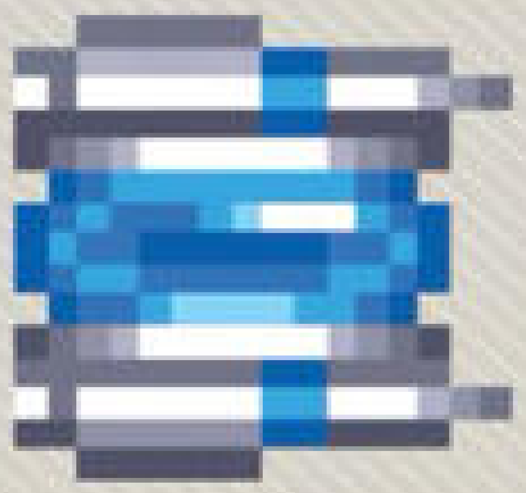
» Large Turret



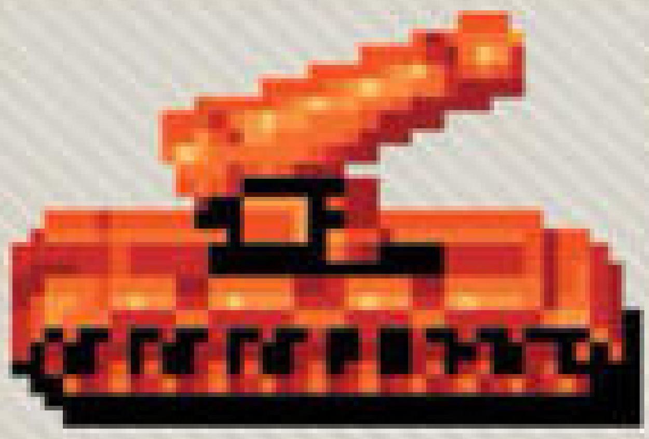
» Camo Fighter



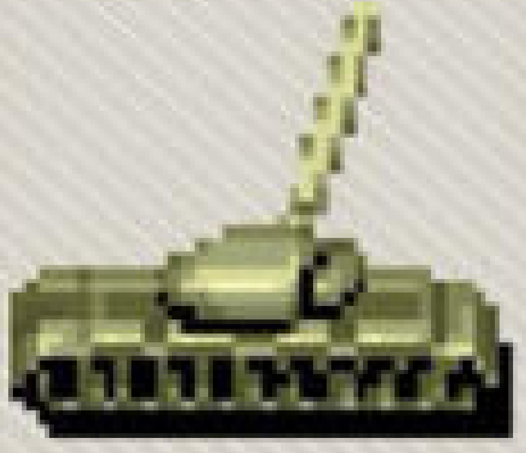
» Multi-Rocket Launcher



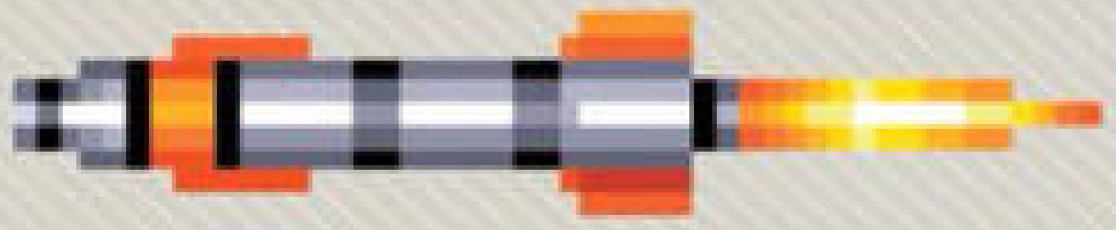
» Power-up



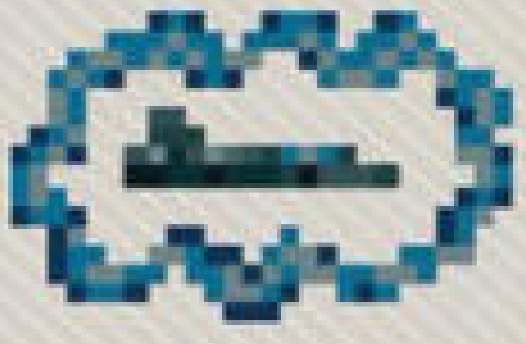
» Red AA Tank



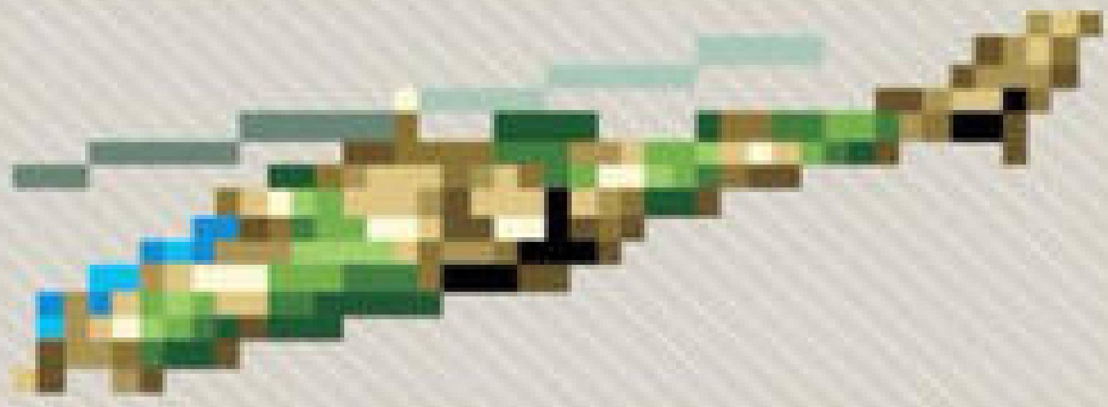
» Tank



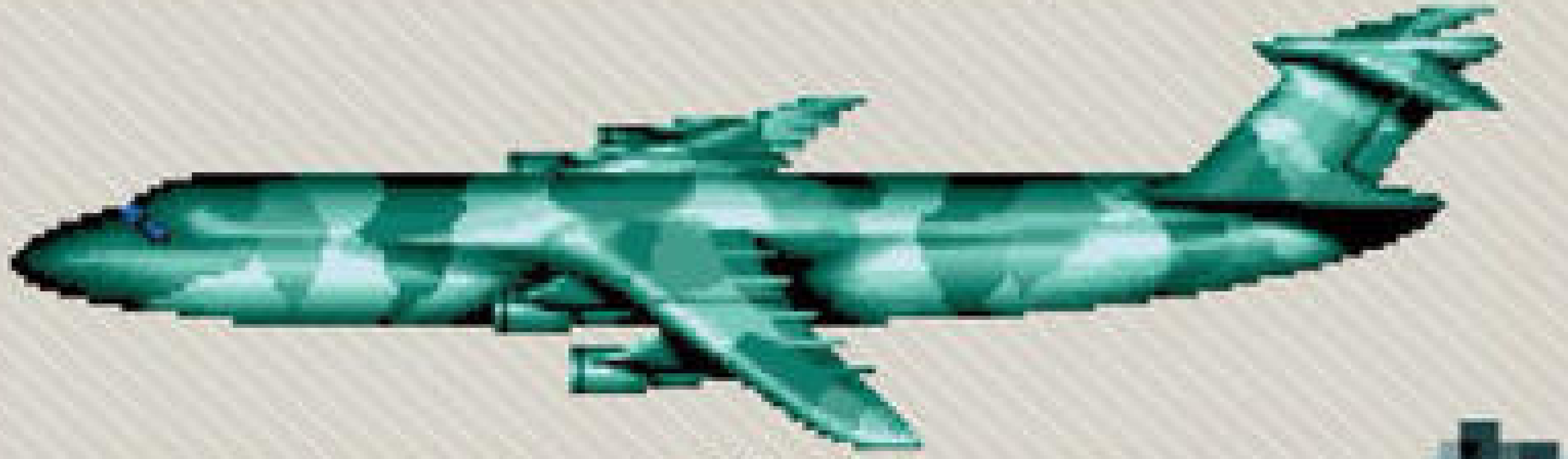
» Enemy Rocket



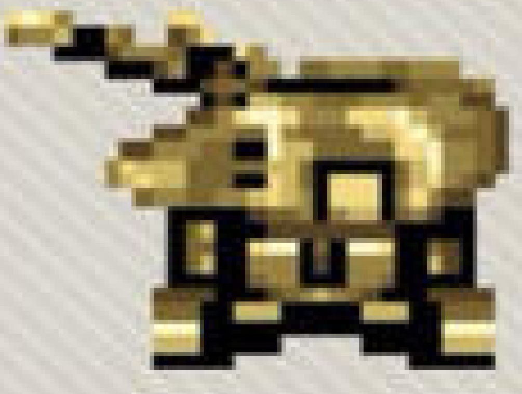
» Shield



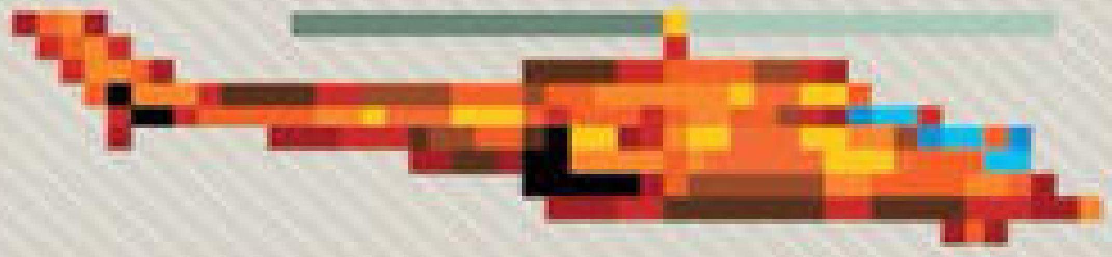
» Camo Helicopter



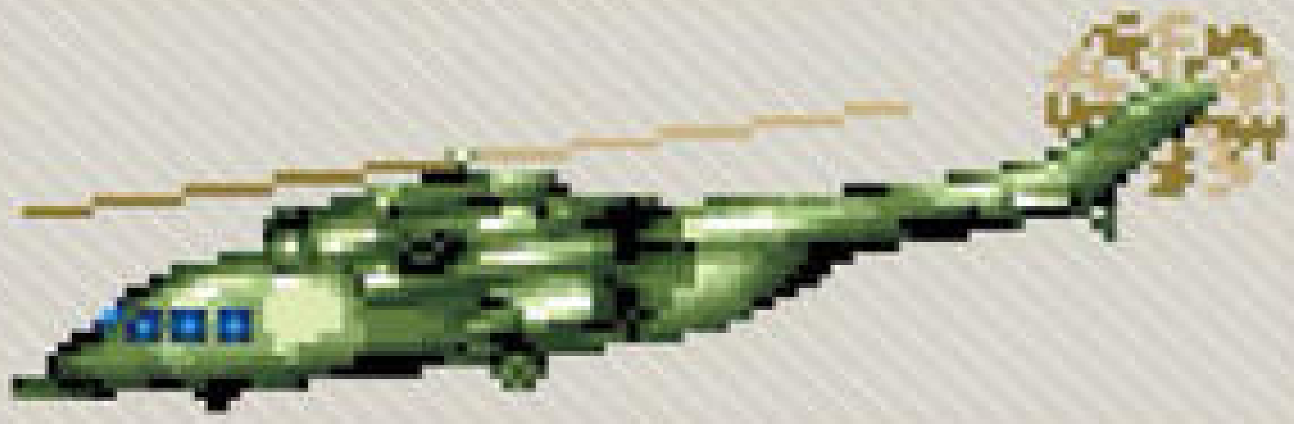
» Bullhead



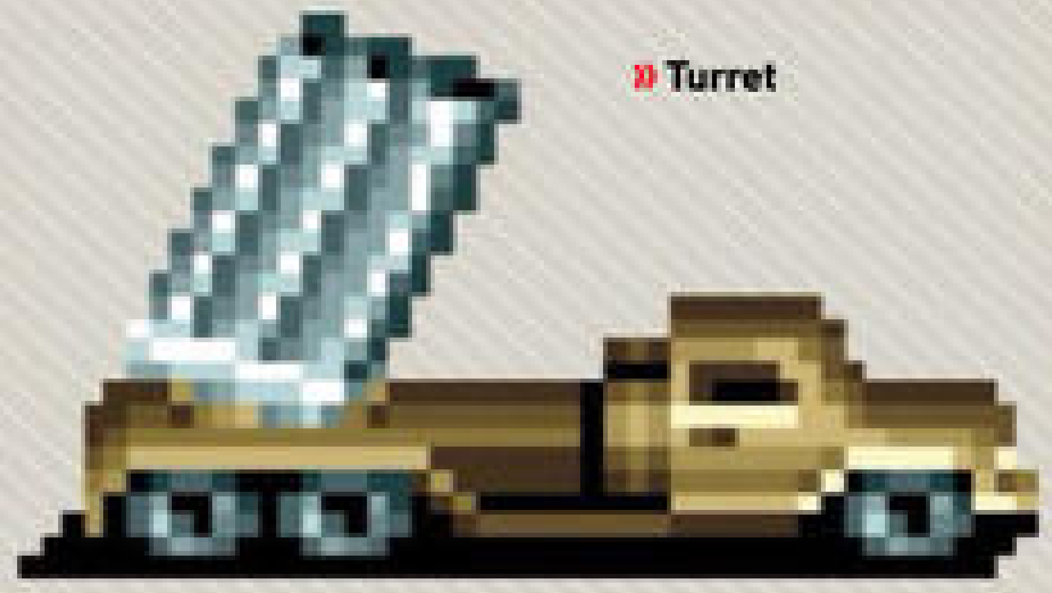
» Turret



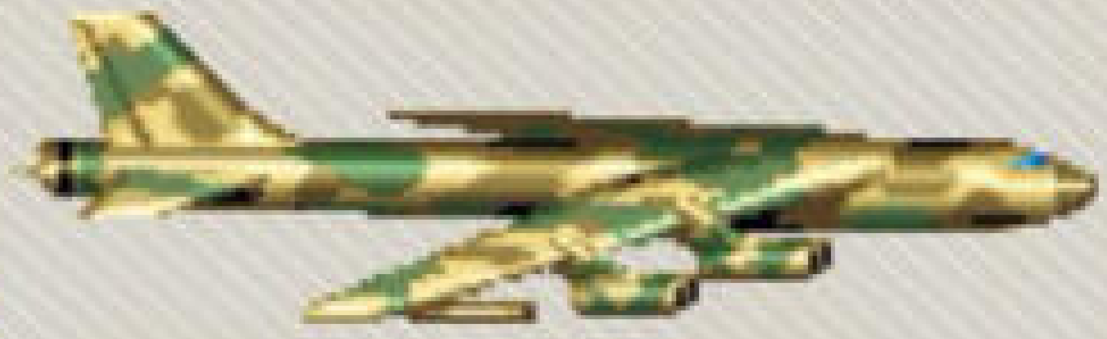
» Red Helicopter



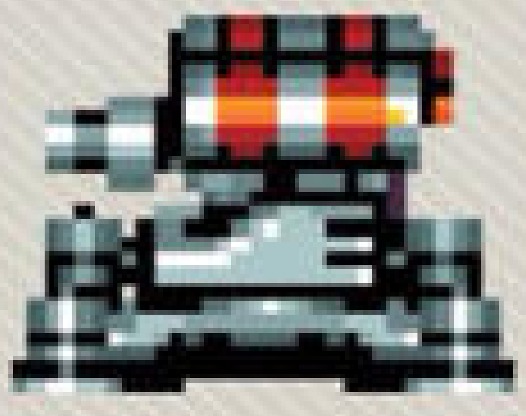
» Large Helicopter



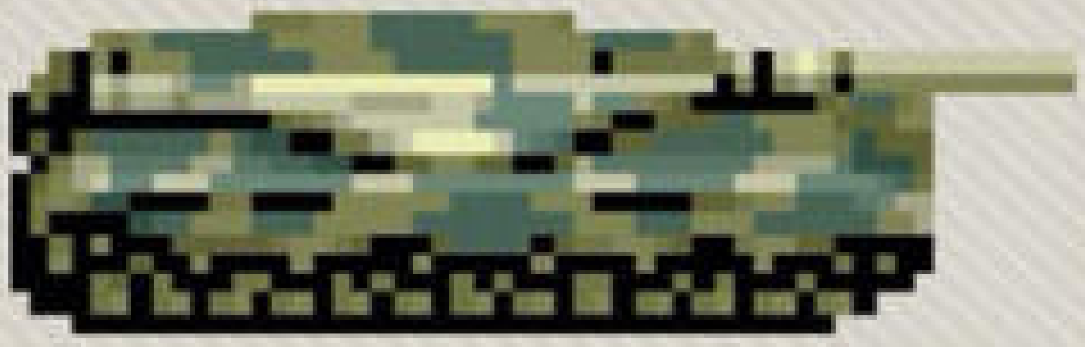
» Missile Truck



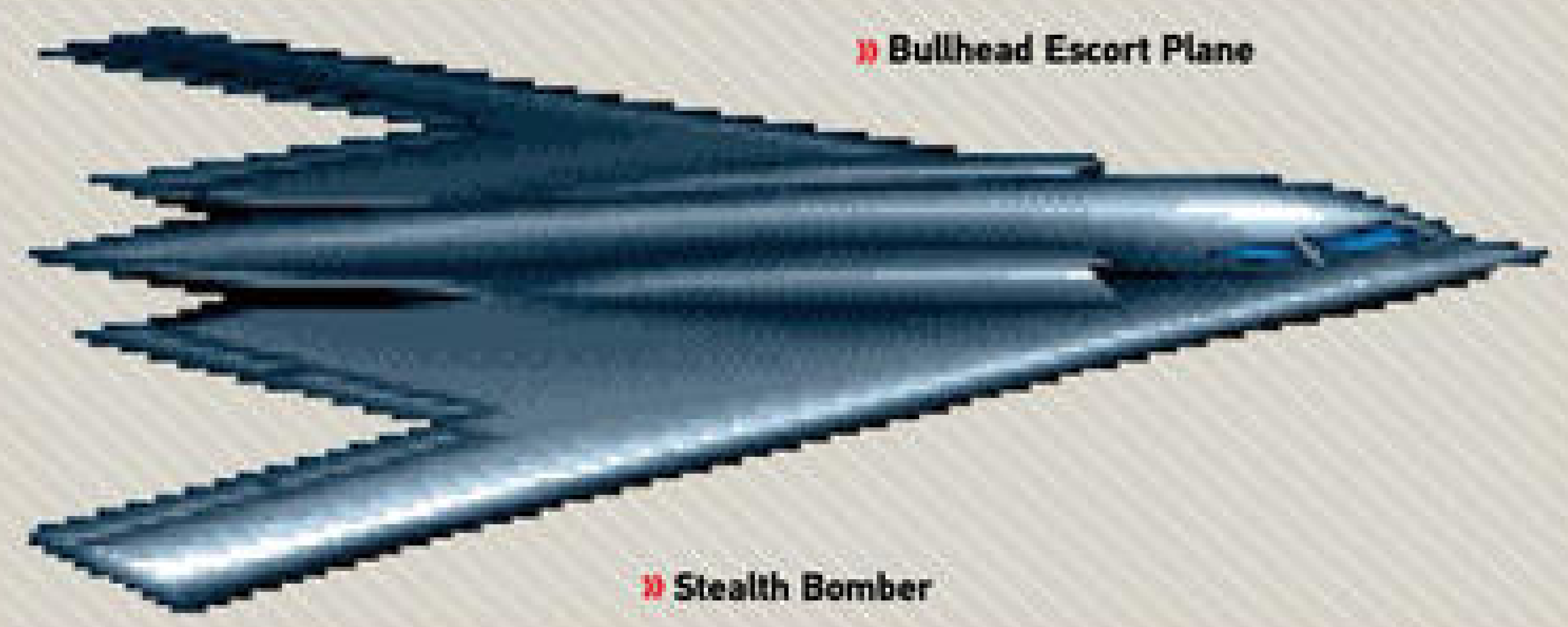
» Bullhead Escort Plane



» Flame Turret



» Desert Tank



» Stealth Bomber

Critical Reception

What the gaming press thought...

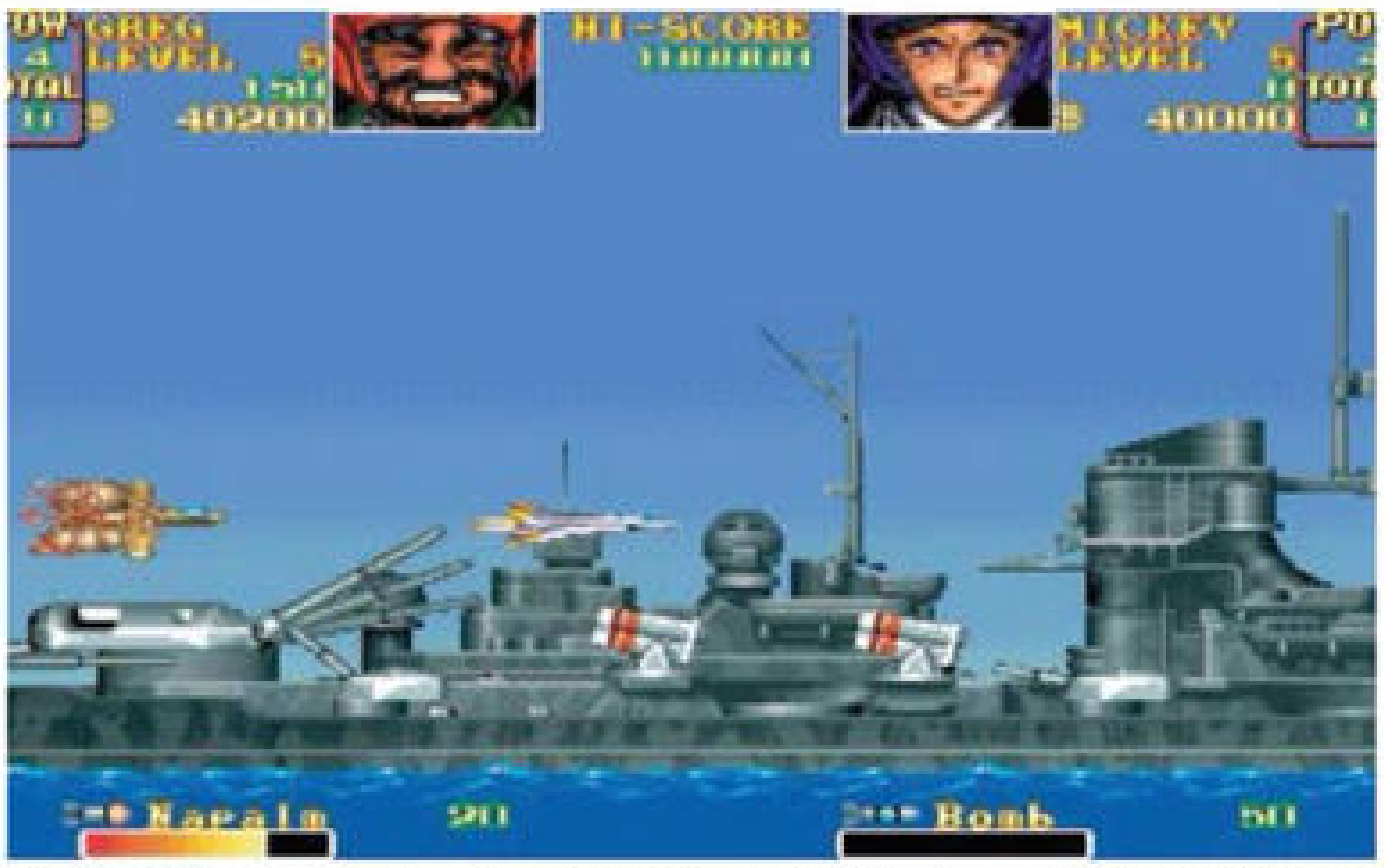
> "Featuring knockout graphics, stunning sound, superlative gameplay and a tough challenge, U.N. Squadron (or Area 88 in Japan) is one of the best blasters available on any system"
>
> – MEAN MACHINES, ISSUE 12

Twin Galaxies High Scores

ARCADE (SINGLE-PLAYER)
NAME: DWAYNE RICHARD
POINTS: 1,960,400

MAME (SINGLE-PLAYER)
NAME: RUDY CHAVEZ
POINTS: 1,439,050

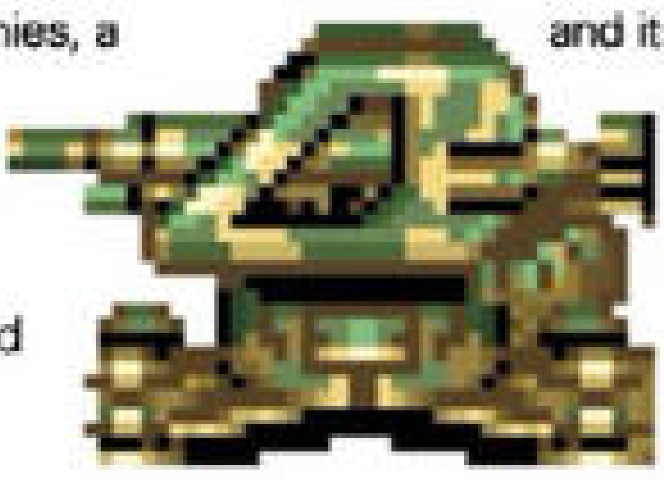
prevent a tyrannous organisation known as Project 4 from seizing control of Area 88 – the last bastion for the good guys – and ultimately taking over the world, or something along those lines. You are giving the option to control one of three characters: Shin, Shin's friend US pilot Mickey Simon, and Greg Gates, a Danish freelance pilot/Mario lookalike who provides comic relief in the manga series. Each pilot has a signature plane with unique fire type. Shin's F-20 Tigershark can only fire forward, as can Mickey's F-14 – though it fires bullets at a slower rate that are larger in size – while Greg's A-10 Thunderbolt has the slowest and weakest main fire of the three planes but can simultaneously fire at the ground at 45 degrees – extremely handy for wiping out ground targets.



[Arcade] *U.N. Squadron* was ace in two-player, making it all the more odd that the mode was omitted from the SNES version..

Power-Up!

U.N. Squadron also featured an array of weapon upgrades and power-ups to add an element of customisation. In similar fashion to earlier shooters such as *Fantasy Zone* and Capcom's own *Forgotten Worlds*, these items were purchasable and made available via an item shop. With selection limited to the amount of money you had successfully banked in the game, earned by shooting down enemies, a degree of strategy came from you weighing up whether to buy up what you could afford at the start of each stage, or save your money so you could splash out on the more expensive armaments later.

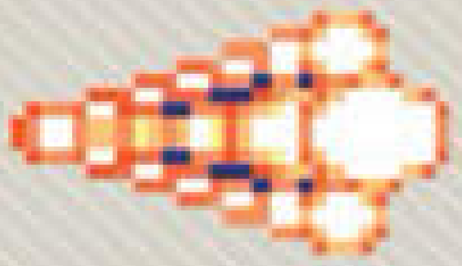


U.N. Squadron ran on Capcom's all-singing, all-dancing CP System (CPS-1). The cart-based arcade hardware powered some of the developer's biggest arcade hits, including *Final Fight, Strider, Ghouls 'N Ghosts* and *Street Fighter II*, and *U.N. Squadron* is a particularly great showcase for its power. Its levels are crammed with detail, there are loads of enemy types, and its gargantuan bosses stretched multiple screens. The backgrounds also featured multiple layers of parallax scrolling, often with little to no slowdown.

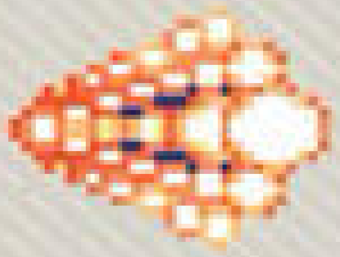
U.N. Squadron was a popular arcade game but became a household name when it was converted to the Super Nintendo. An early release for Nintendo's 16-bit console, on first inspection the port looks faithful, but Capcom made a number of tweaks to the gameplay, the most notable of which saw all three pilots no longer tied to one plane, with purchasable aircraft unlocked as you progressed, and players given the freedom to decide the order they attacked some levels. It also added new weapons and power-ups to the mix, as well as bonus rounds that saw the pilots destroying a convoy of enemy supply trucks to earn bonus points. Finally, and to the chagrin of fans, Capcom also made the game single-player only, as it had controversially done with *Final Fight*. It remains a stunning SNES port.

Power-ups

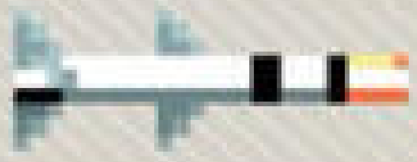
Guns, guns, guns. And more guns. Here's our rundown of the full weapons in U.N. Squadron



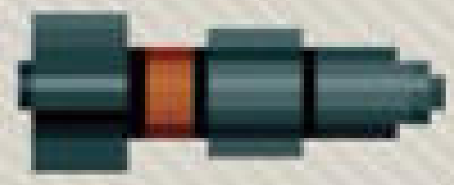
»Bulpup
Launches powerful missiles straight ahead. This is your first weapon upgrade.



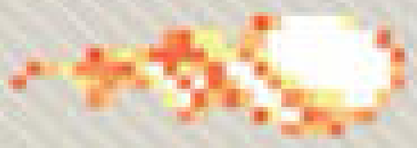
»Bulpup II
Basically an enhanced version of the Bulpup – the missiles are more powerful.



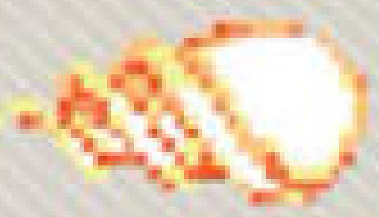
»Phoenix
A useful weapon, it releases powerful missiles that home in on enemy craft.



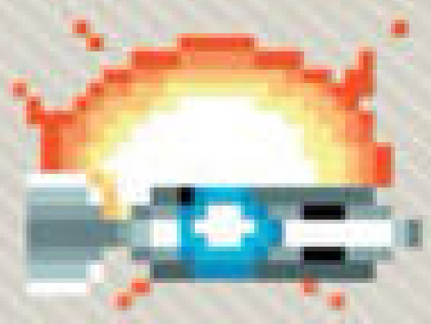
»Falcon
An upgraded version of the Phoenix, its missiles create more damage.



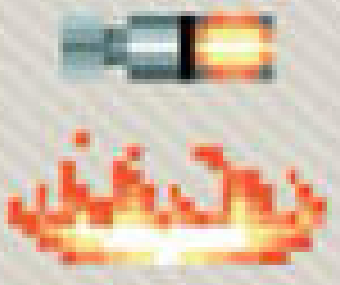
»Super Shell
Fires a fast concentrated stream of shells ahead of the plane.



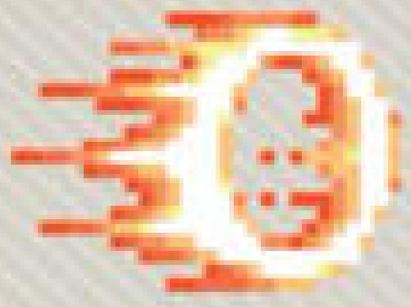
»Super Shell II
Okay, this is just getting silly now – an upgraded Super Shell.



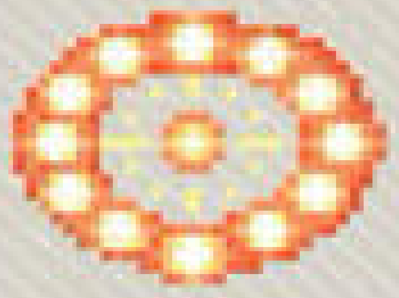
»Bomb II
Enables your plane to drops bombs and effectively take down ground targets.



»Napalm
Works in a similar way to Bomb II, but impact creates a trail of flames.



»Round Laser
Fires a powerful and large ring of fire. It's one of the most effective weapons in the game.



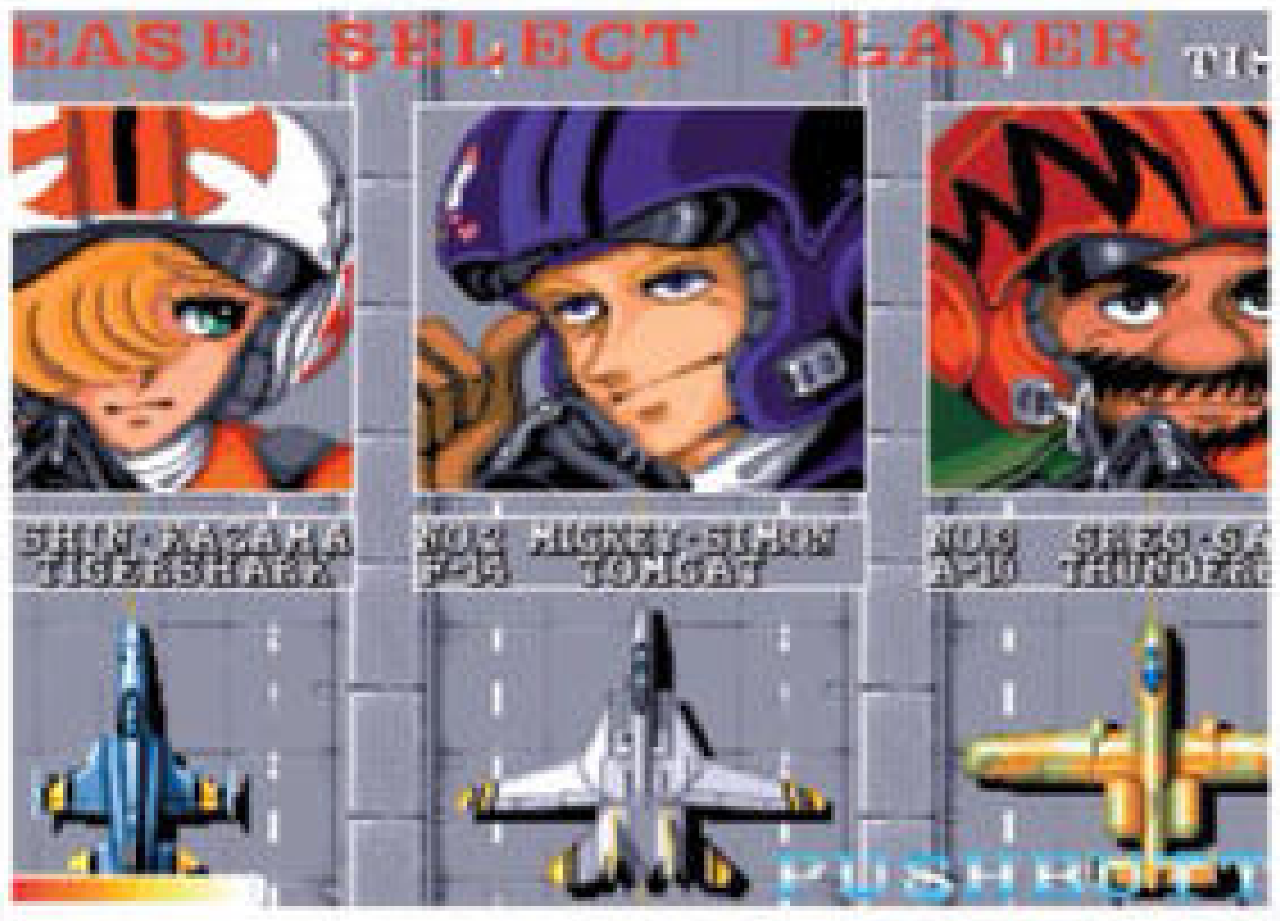
»16-way Shot
A defensive weapon that unleashes a shield of bullets that surround the plane.

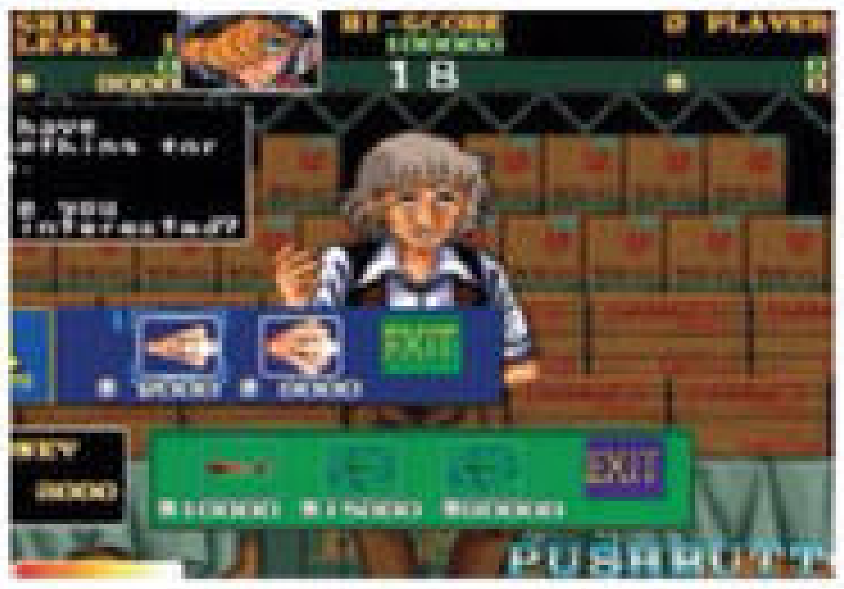
Memorable Moments

We rocket through the bits of U.N Squadron that were planely the best

The U.N. trifecta

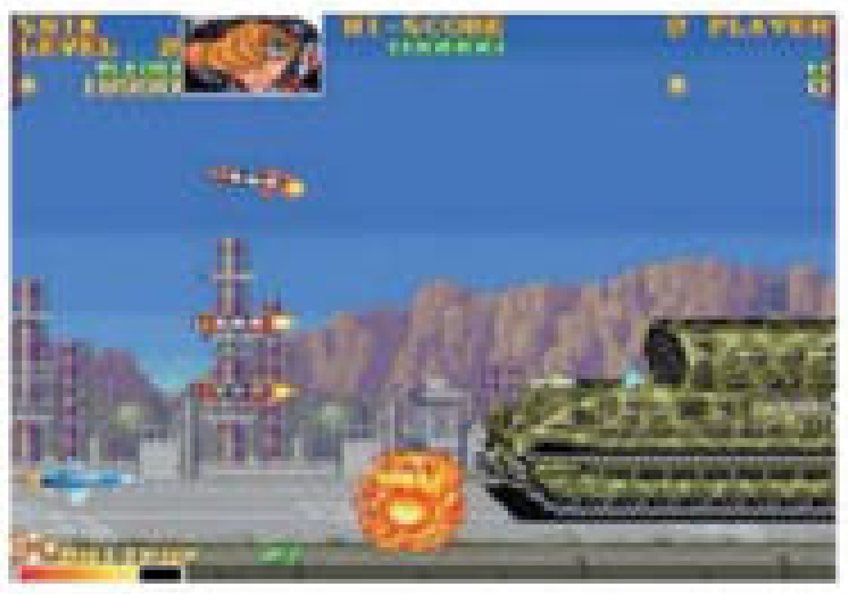
Having the option to select different crafts was nothing new to shooter gaming, but in *U.N. Squadron* the feature is done really well, with each pilot given their own personality, and individual fire types that make them stand out from each other.





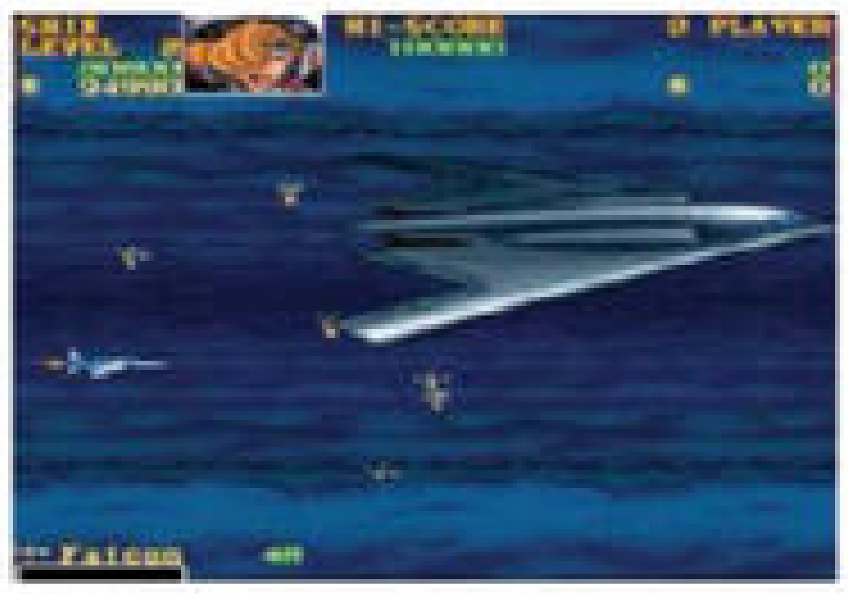
Upgrades

Before the start of each mission, you visit this guy. He's basically Area 88's Q, and fixes you up with various weapon and power upgrades. There is a charge for his services though. Those Area 88 bigwigs are tightwads.



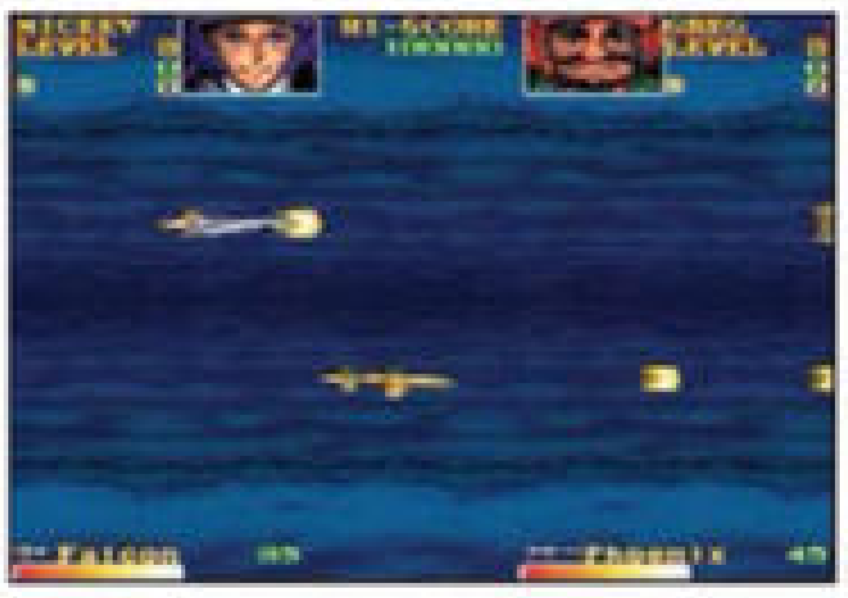
Taxing tank

The first stage takes place at a radar installation. It's a cheery-looking stage, but don't be fooled into thinking it settles you in slowly; it's a challenging opener, and ends with the pilots battling this massive missile-launching tank.



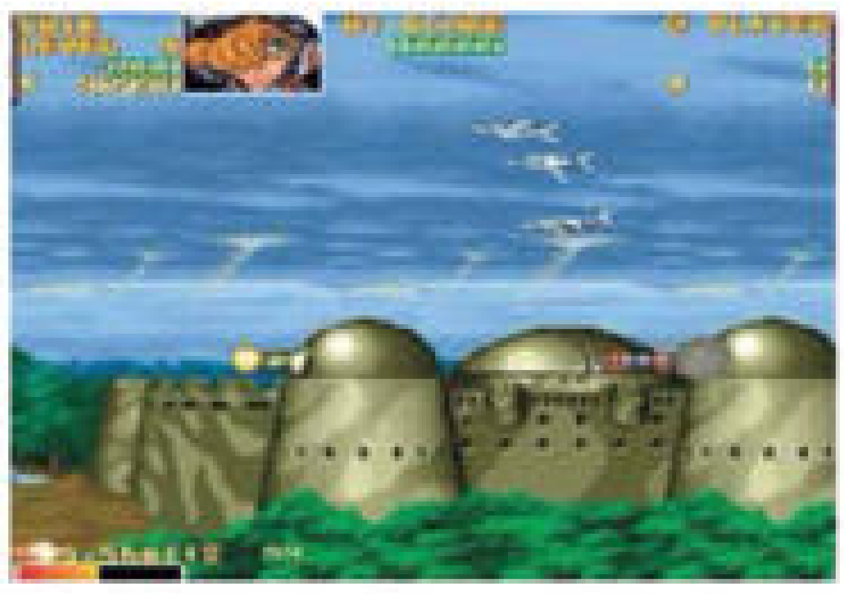
Capcom's black bomber

The second stage ends with a battle against a stealth bomber, which, judging by its mass beside our ship can't be all that stealthy. A better-proportioned version of this boss featured on the game's US flyer.



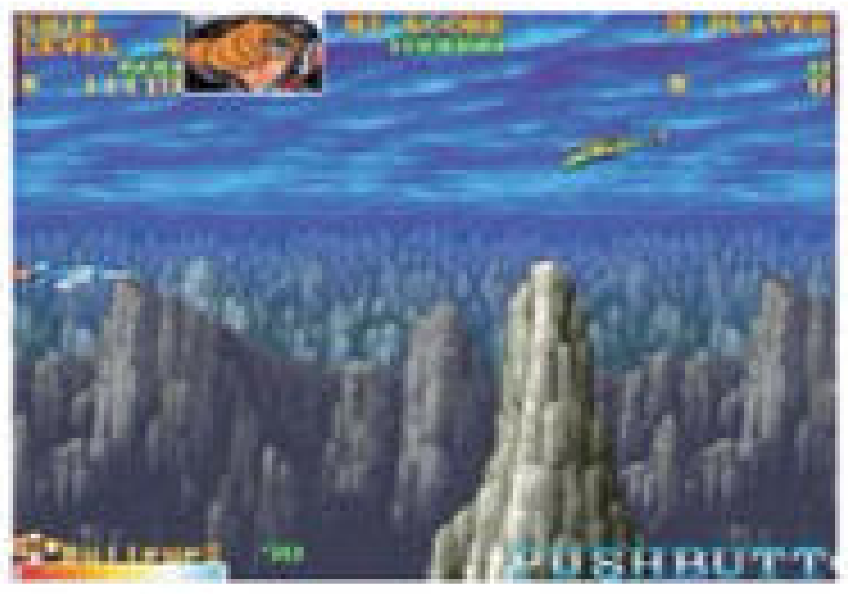
Bring a wingman

U.N. Squadron really comes alive when you're playing with a friend. You can live out your Maverick and Iceman fantasies without anyone thinking it weird. Well, less weird. Shame the SNES version forces you to fly solo.



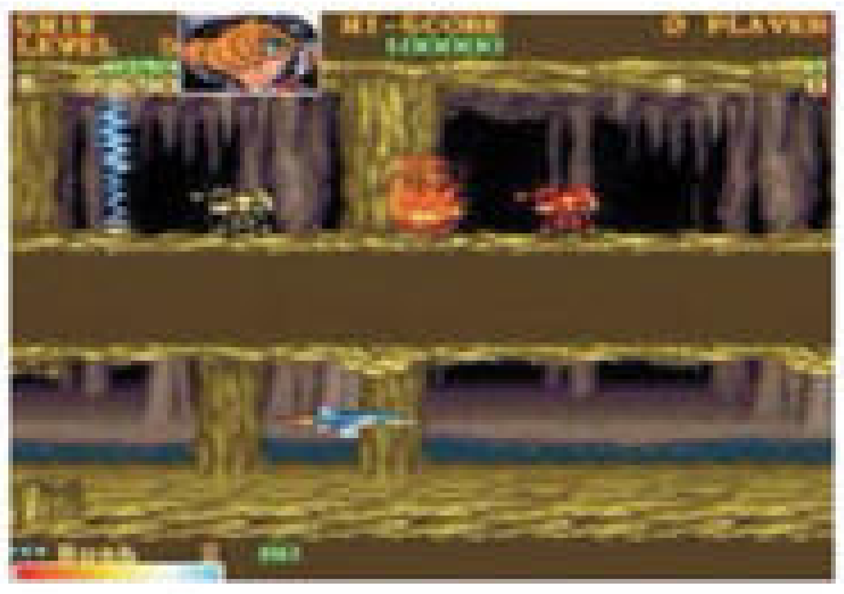
The forestry decommission

The end of stage three sees the pilots trying to destroy an enemy base forged deep in the heart of a forest. One of the more challenging bosses in the game, you're repeatedly forced to fly over the base until its main cannon is destroyed.



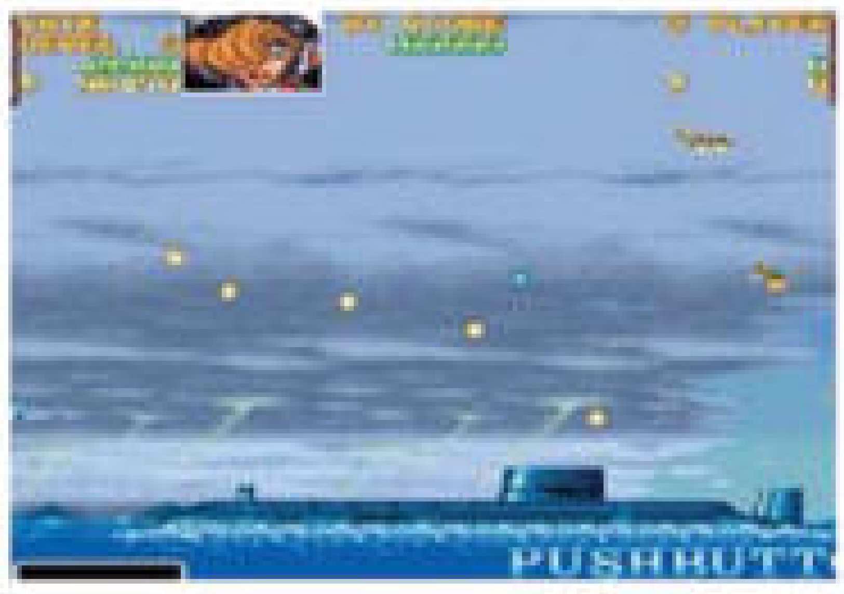
Grand canyon

Mission 5 takes place in a gorgeous canyon that does a splendid job of showing off the impressive amount of parallax scrolling there is in the game. Try not to become too distracted by the pretty views though.



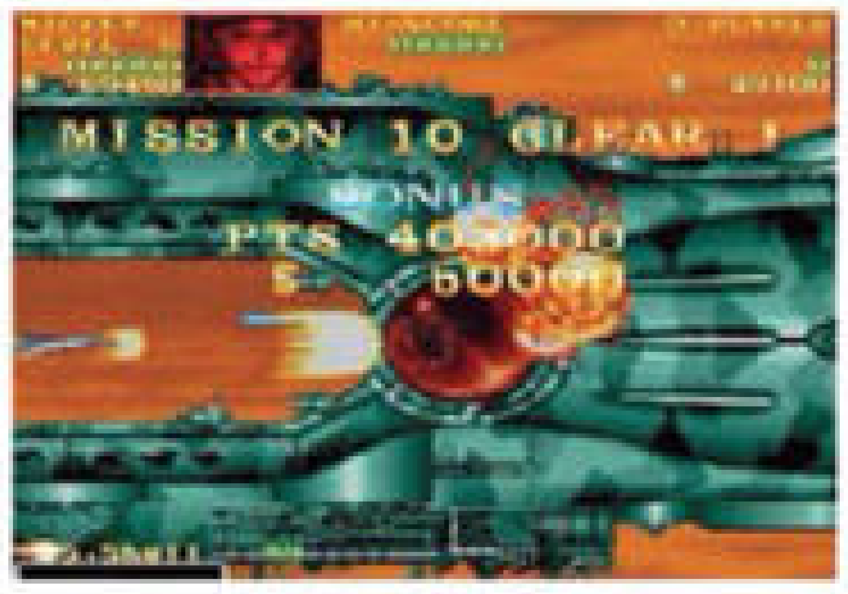
Cave glory

Stage 6 sees the pilots entering a cave base to destroy a huge missile launcher deep inside. The tight corridors and falling rocks in this stage make it one of the trickiest missions in the game.



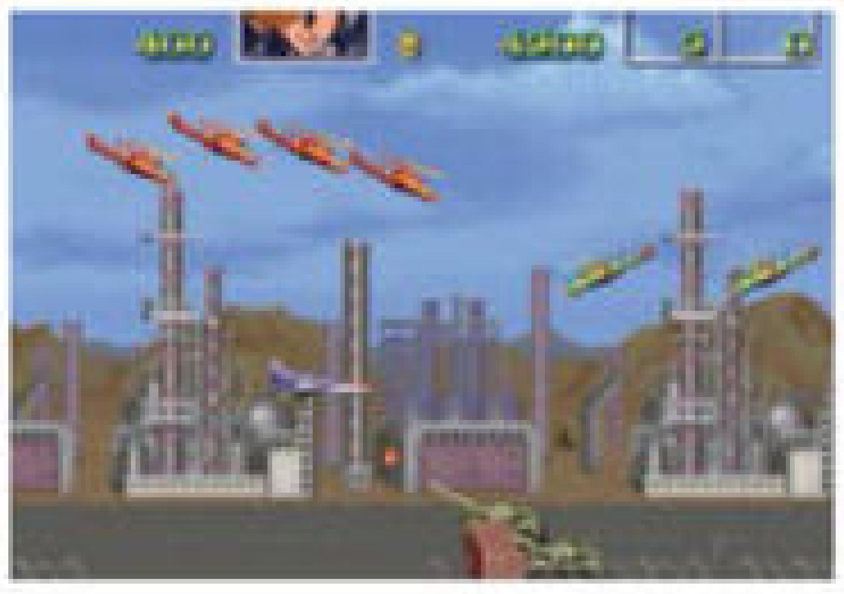
The sub standard

A large submarine emerges from the depths of the ocean. Thankfully, it's a sensible size and doesn't pose much of a problem. The same cannot be said for the boss of this stage, however – a heavily armed battleship.



Bydo frigape

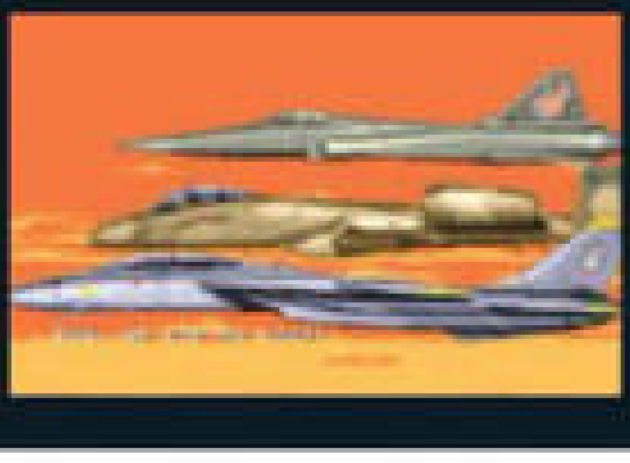
The final boss is an incredibly tough nut to crack. Strikingly similar to the iconic frigate in *R-Type* – even the way you attack it is similar, as you have to reach its energy core – the entire level takes the form of an epic boss battle.



SNES-sational

The SNES conversion certainly looked to be a faithful version of *U.N. Squadron*, but a play reveals that Capcom made a number of fundamental changes to the gameplay, including slightly different/altered levels.

After nine intense stages, the final mission sees Shin, Mickey and Greg trying to decommission Project 4's giant air fortress. It's an epic boss fight that recalls R-Type's iconic frigate stage. After the battle, U.N. Squadron flashes up a number of different end animations, depending on the collection of a hidden pick-up – unlocked by achieving certain criteria – in each level.



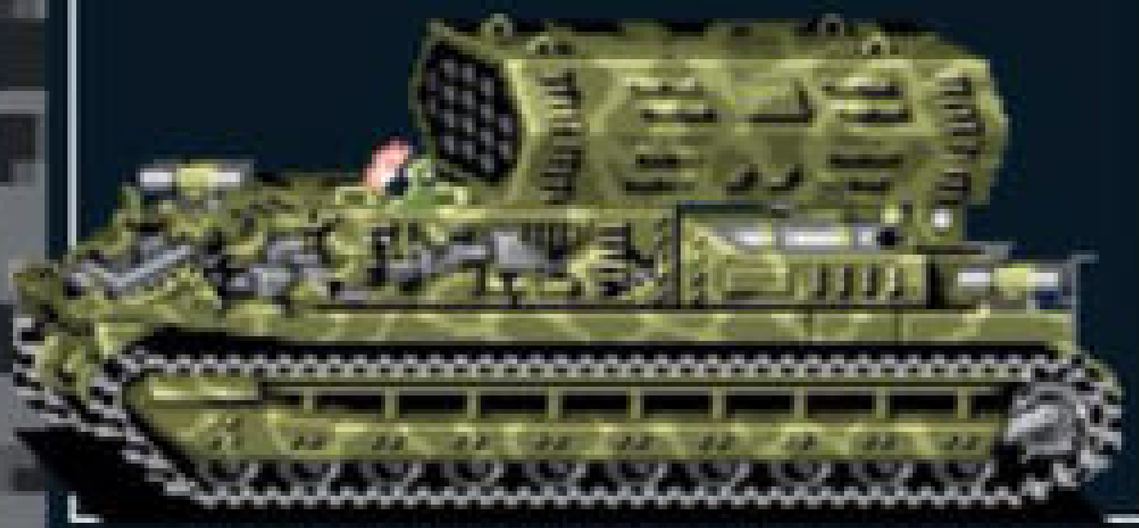
Enemy Briefing

Three pretty good words to best describe *U.N. Squadron*'s bosses are: monolithic mechanical monstrosities. Dwarfing our heroes' planes by a considerable margin, if Project 4's armada of ships, planes and fortresses isn't filling up screen space – and basically giving your plane very little room to manoeuvre – they're formidable forms stretching across several screens, requiring a combination of grit, patience and dextrous flying to defeat. Here's our guide to the ten enemy targets in the game.

STAGE 1
THE MULTI-ROCKET LAUNCHER

The first boss in the game is this gargantuan missile launcher. It might look to be an imposing opening boss but it's actually quite easy to defeat. Not only does it hold its position at the far right of the screen but its only means of attack are standard and homing rockets. Therefore this big blighter can be eradicated with some simple up-and-down flying while holding down the fire button. Hint: fly up when he's firing rockets, fly back down when he's not.

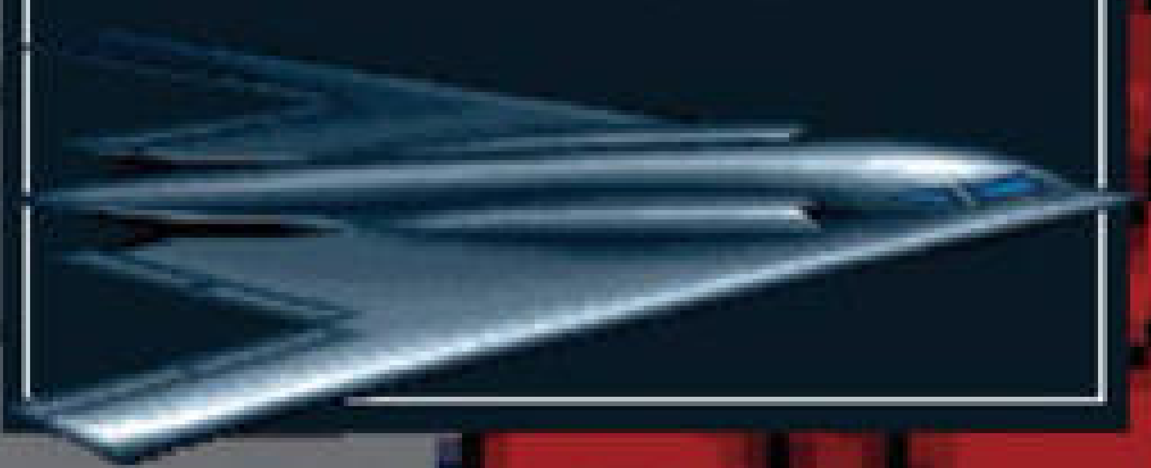
Difficulty rating: ★



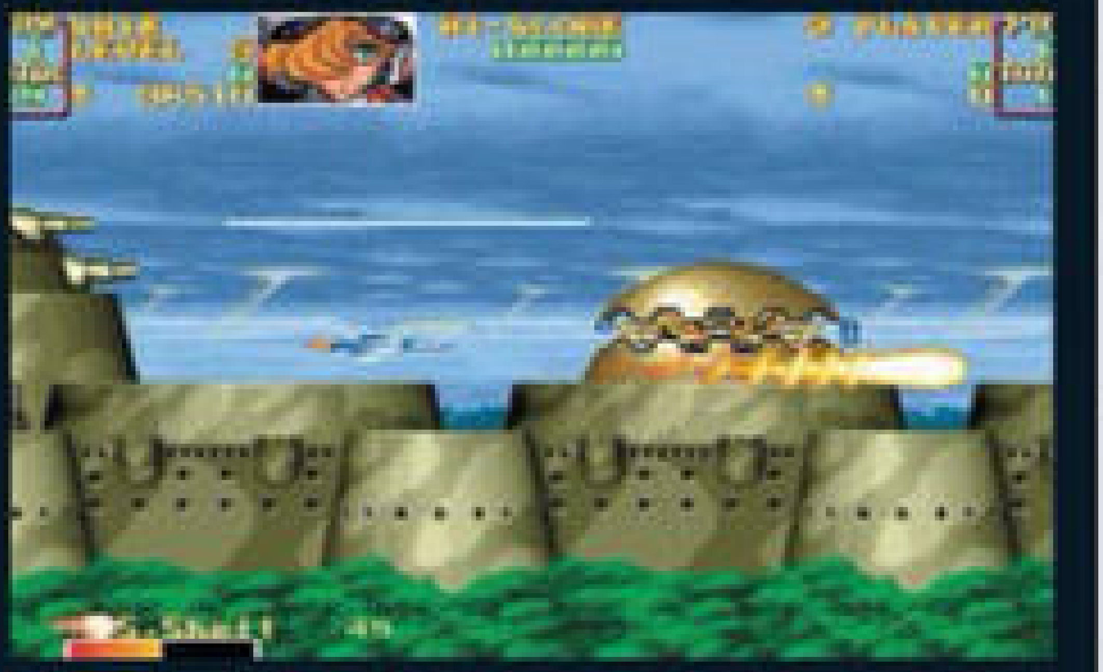
STAGE 2
STEALTH BOMBER

The 'invisible stealth bomber', as you can clearly see from this screenshot, isn't actually invisible. In fact, given its huge size we'd argue that it's bloody uber-visible. Anyway, this second stage boss doesn't pose too many headaches – if you're quick at taking it down, that is. You see all those things in the sky that look like Chinese Lanterns? They're floating mines dropped into the sky by the bomber, and collision with them is deadly. Therefore a good tactic is to initially concentrate on avoiding the mines rather than precision firing on the target, but then immediately switch tactic the second it starts to fire off indestructible missiles: basically at this point you want to take it out as quickly as you can.

Difficulty rating: ★★★



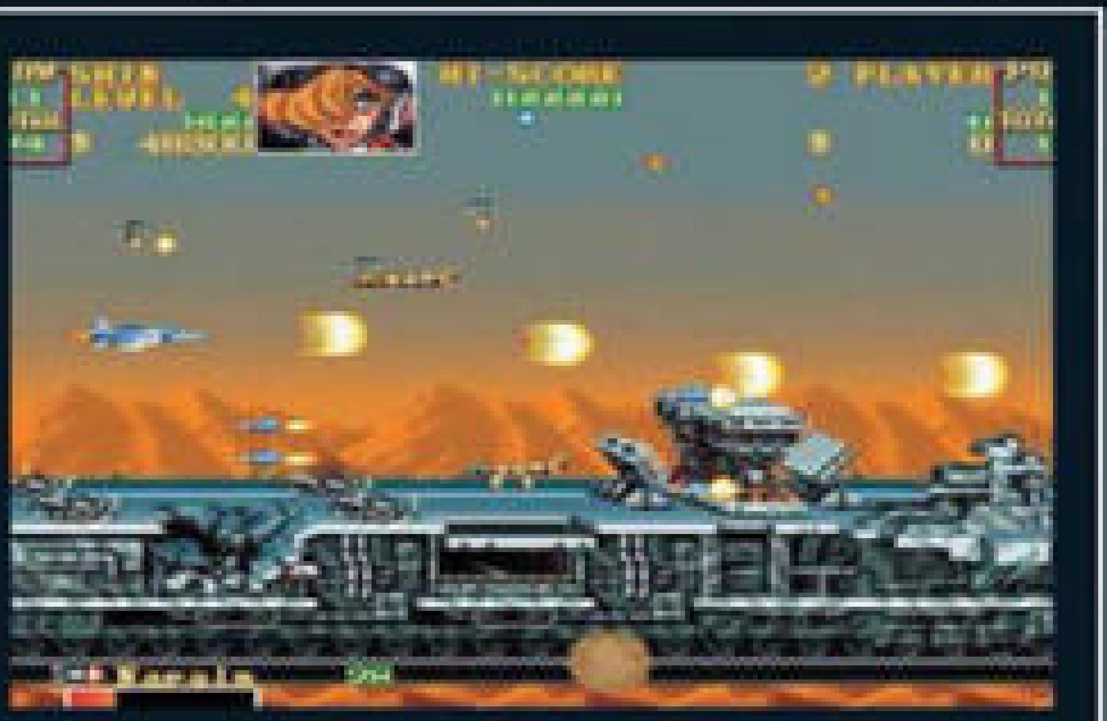
STAGE 3
FOREST FORTRESS



This is the point at which the difficulty of *U.N. Squadron* steps up a gear. The boss of this stage takes the form of a huge enemy base armed to the teeth with turrets that are in turn armed to the teeth with rockets. The most annoying sections of the base are the two large laser-firing turrets that bookend the weak spot of the facility. To destroy the base you actually only need to take out the core. As soon as it appears on screen, hammer it with everything you've got. Two low-pass flybys should provide you with enough time to seal the deal.

Difficulty rating: ★★★

STAGE 4
CARRIER



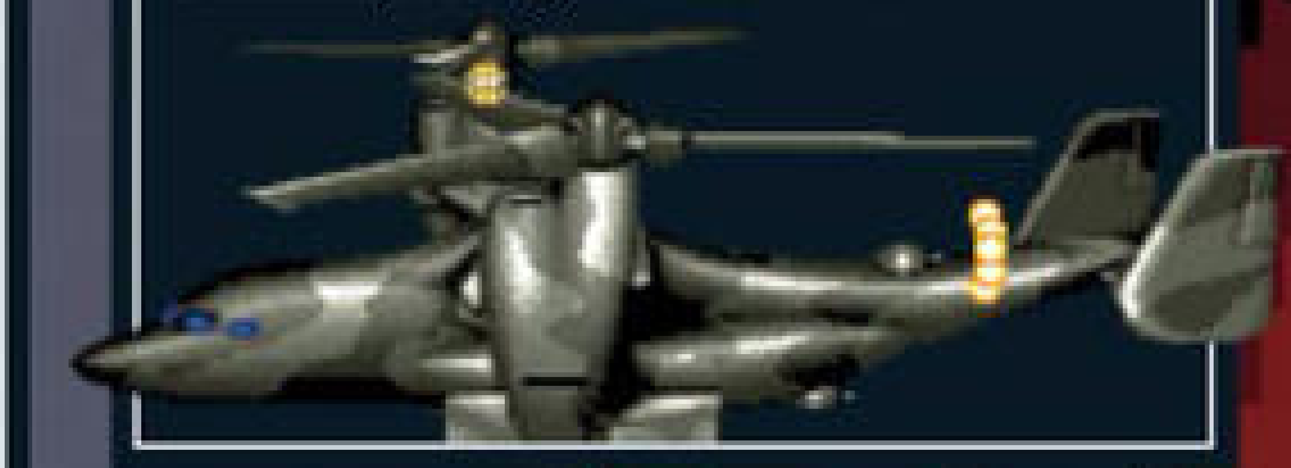
This target is basically just an aircraft carrier, but with one interesting difference: it travels on land rather than sea. Yep, those crazy chaps at Project 4 have successful mated a tank with an aircraft carrier, and the zany result is this. It's another one of *U.N. Squadron*'s long bosses, and it attacks by letting off fighter planes and missiles straight up in the air, which are a bugger to dodge. In any case, you must either dodge or shoot down its attacks until you reach the thing that looks like a muscle car engine. Unleash everything you've got at this and this land-based supership will promptly sink into a sandy grave.

Difficulty rating: ★★★

STAGE 5
BAYSON

The giant bomber Bayson is one of trickiest bosses in *U.N. Squadron*. While its giant stature suggests it should be a comfortable target, it proves anything but a fly in the park, as its tail gun fires an insane amount of bullets that prove difficult to evade. Meanwhile, at the same time it's doing this, it occasionally drops enemy fighters into the mix to distract your attention. A good tactic is therefore to keep your distance from Bayson so that you can give yourself as much time as possible to react to its exhausting attacks.

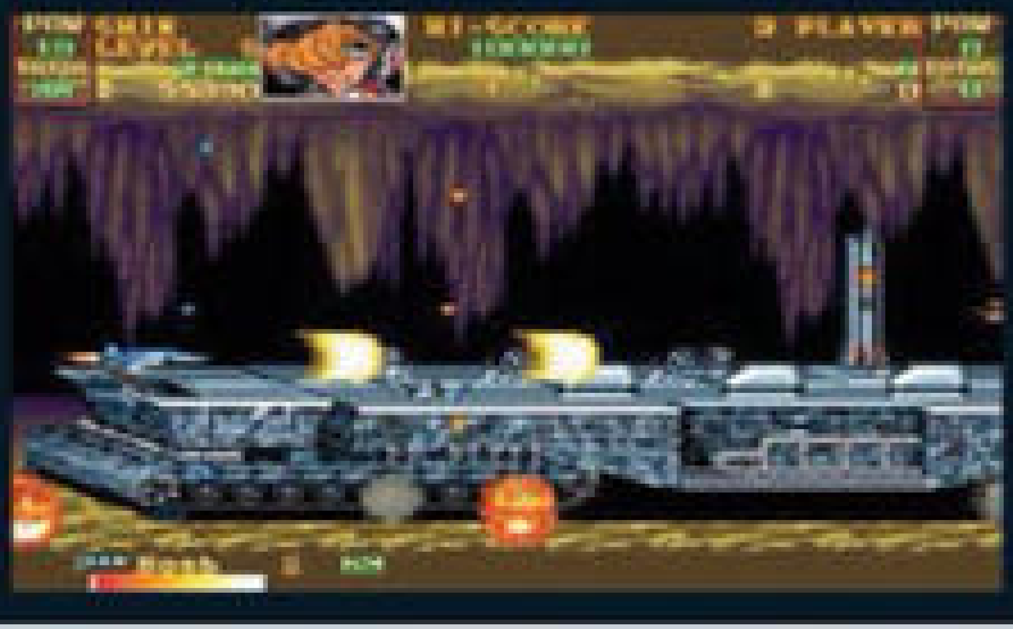
Difficulty rating: ★★★★



STAGE 6
MISSILE LAUNCHER

A very similar boss to the carrier that closes Stage 4, this missile carrier attacks in a similar manner, launching a combination of fighters and missiles in the air, but with the added danger that this time fighters will occasionally show up on the scene and drop napalm everywhere. As before, work your way towards the core found at the end of the launcher and keep firing at it until it eventually gives up the ghost.

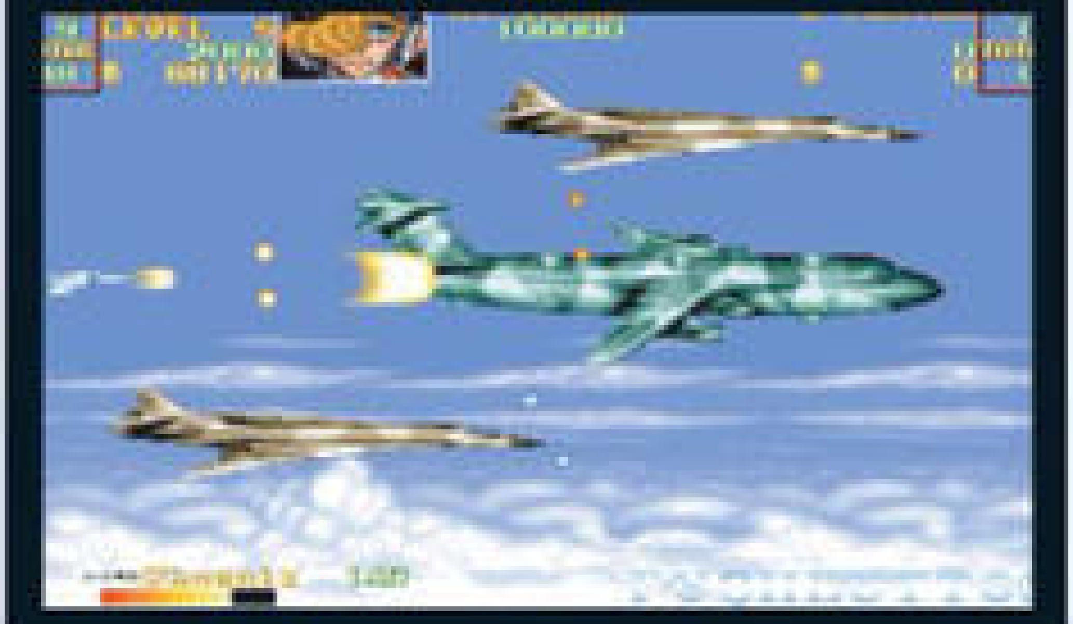
Difficulty rating: ★★★



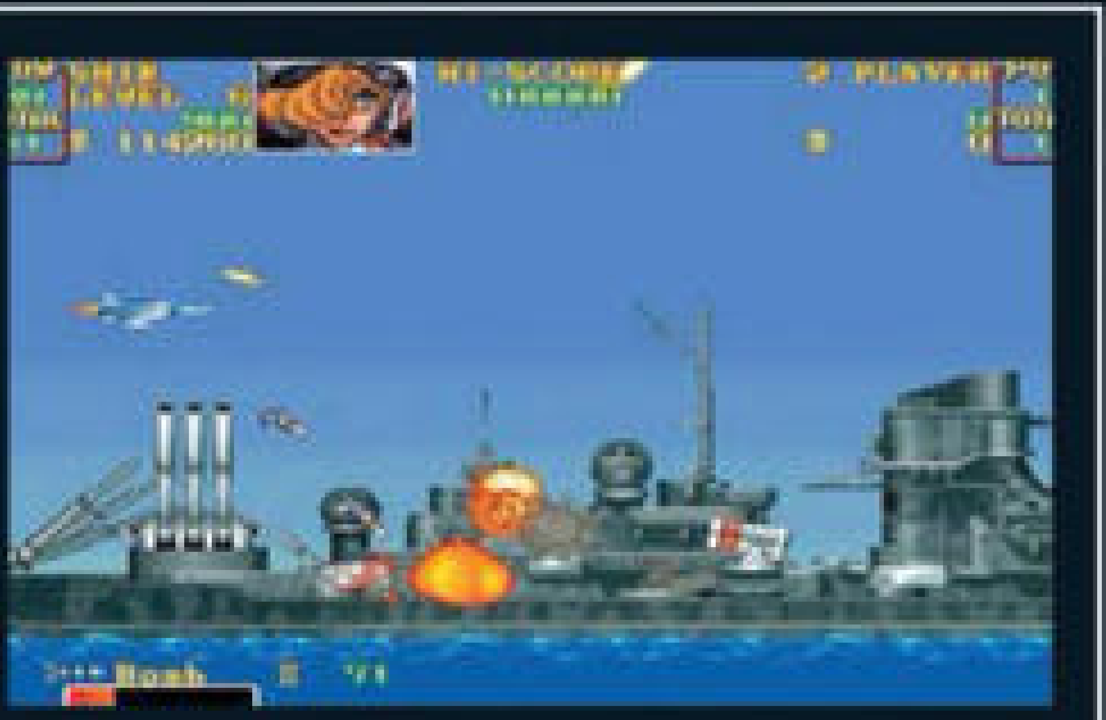
STAGE 7
BULLHEAD

Oddly, despite its late appearance this is actually one of the easiest bosses. Bullhead is a freight plane escorted by two large fighters. Neither guard plane is capable of taking a lot of damage, so a good trick is to keep pummelling Bullhead with gunfire and missiles until his bodyguards arrive on the scene, and then turn your attention to them. Once the two fighters are destroyed, Bullhead is pretty easy to pick off.

Difficulty rating: ★



STAGE 8
MINKS



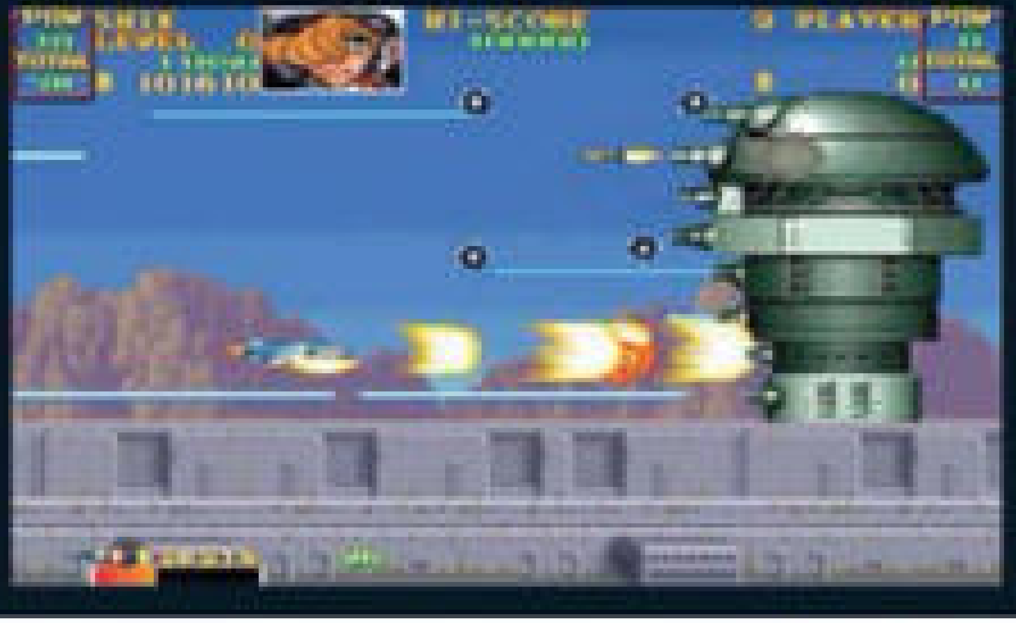
An odd name for a battleship – it sounds like a name you'd give a cat – but nevertheless Minks is one of the best boss fights in the game. To sink this huge and ridiculously named battleship you have to take out all of the giant gun turrets that are positioned on its deck. This is no easy job, as Minks has plenty of turrets, plenty of secondary guns, and basically enjoys throwing an awful lot at you at once, including kamikaze pilots. As with Stage 3, failure to destroy the targets in one fly pass will see your plane swing by for a second attempt. If you're skilled enough you should be able to finish the fight in two attempts.

Difficulty rating: ★★★★

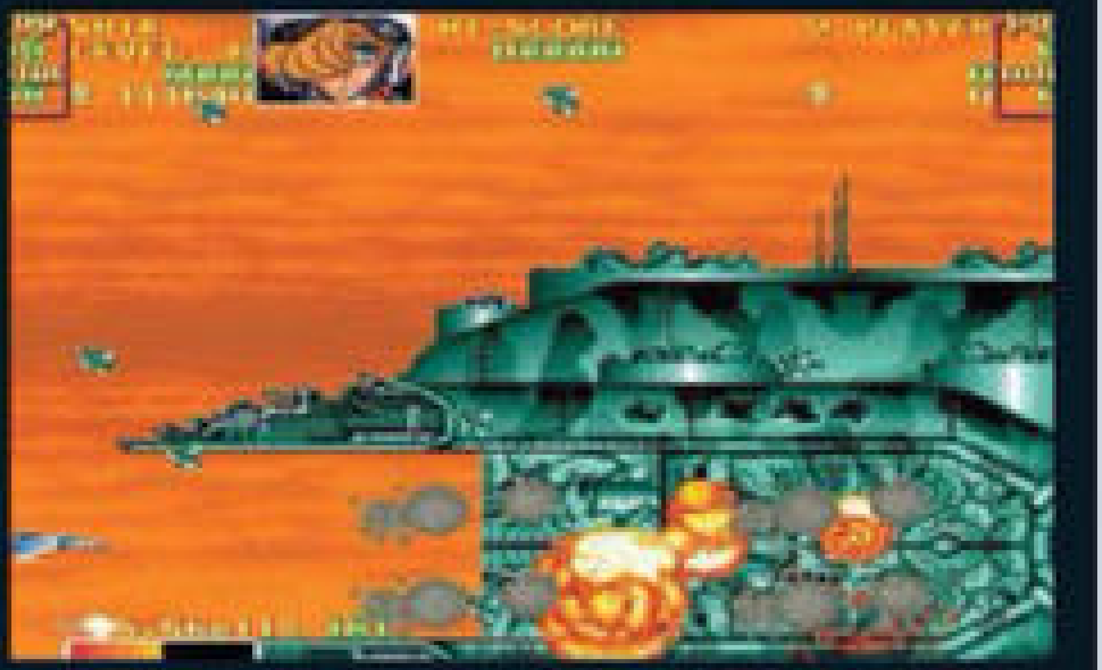
STAGE 9
ARSENAL

As this screenshot shows quite ably, this boss pretty much chucks a barrage of enemy and gunfire your way. This tricky target takes the form of a bunker that is protected by a giant telescopic tower made up of eight mini-laser and rocket turrets. In addition to these, enemy fighters also enter the fray. As you don't need to destroy the individual cannons to destroy the tower, our advice is to simply fly as low to the bunker as you possibly can (exactly as we've done in the shot below), and concentrate on the bottom turrets. Most of the enemy fire directed at you will simply pass overhead, with the exception of a few kamikaze planes and bullets that can easily be taken care of.

Difficulty rating: ★★★★



STAGE 10
PROJECT 4 FORTRESS



In what could be a possible homage to the third stage in *R-Type*, the final mission of *U.N. Squadron* is one big boss battle against Project 4's giant air frigate. The fortress is absolutely massive in size. As such, the majority of this battle is taken up with avoiding gunfire, rockets and lasers long enough to eventually reach its only weak spot. When you've reached this point, you must blast a way to the ship's core, being careful to avoid the damaged debris that breaks free. This is incredibly tricky, as you are given little room to manoeuvre when you're inside the air vessel, and you have to dodge a constant barrage of lasers and regenerating gun turrets that protect the core. Dextrous flying and steady nerves are your only hope, though if you've managed to get this far you've already proven you have what it takes.

Difficulty rating: ★★★★★

SUPER MARIO KART

BROOMY, BRM, BROOOOOOM!

SUPER
MARIOKART
©1992 Nintendo

- **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **RELEASED:** 1992
- **GENRE:** KART RACER
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** SNES

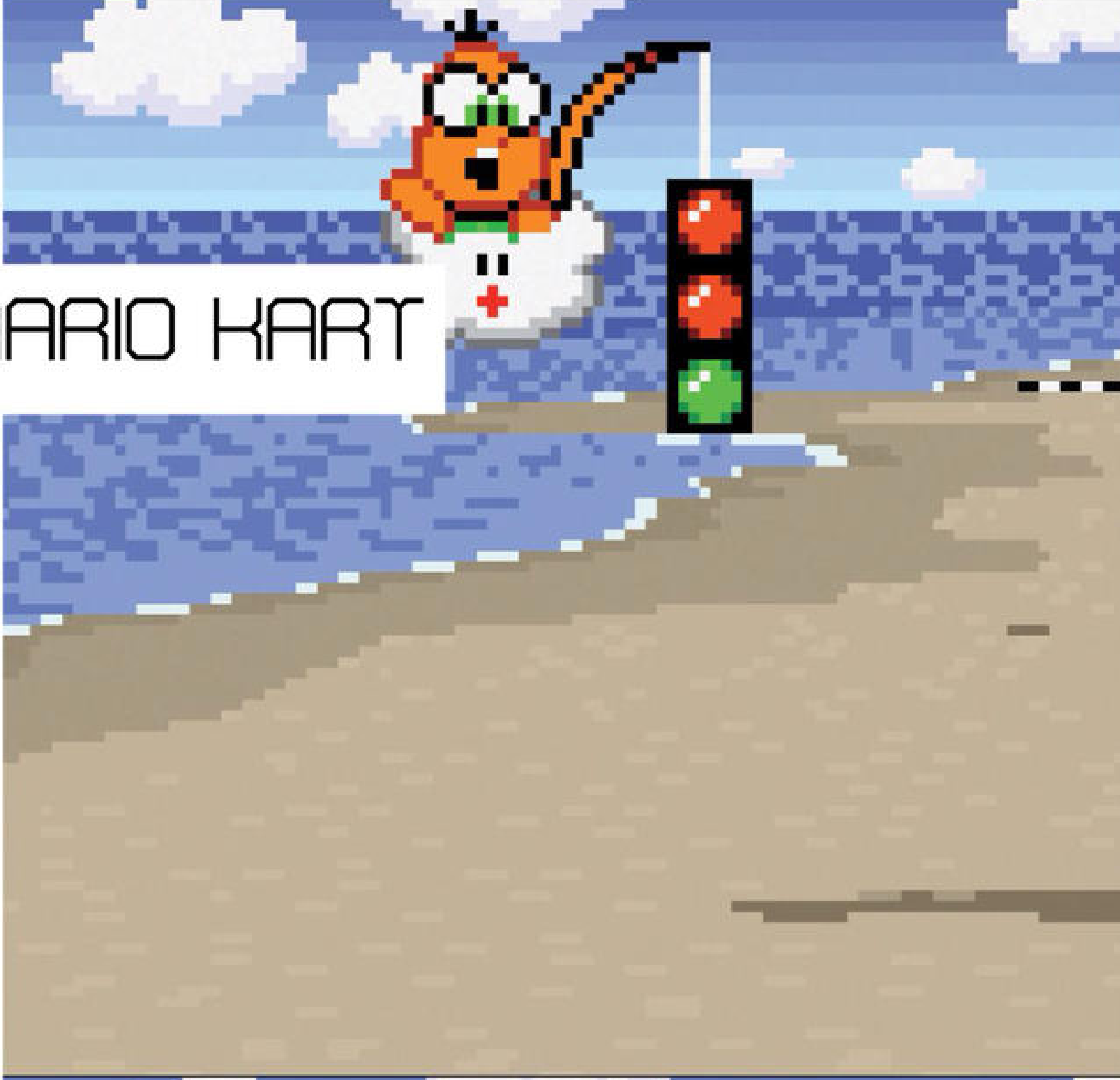
HISTORY

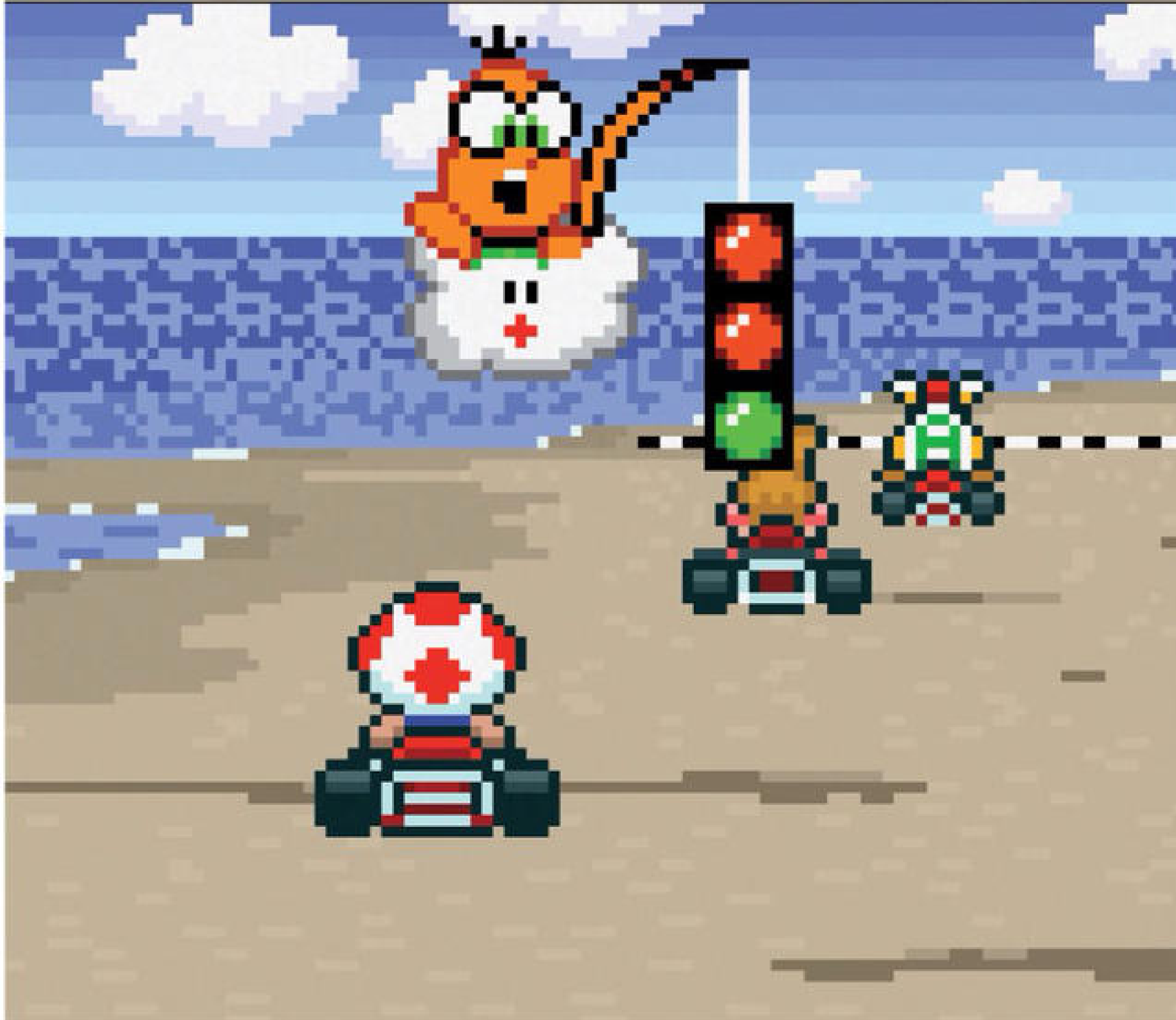
Do you remember Mode 7 from back in the day? Anyone who owned a SNES should, since it was one of the hotter gaming buzz-phrases along with "16 mega-baps", "parallax groping" and "defibrillated joysticks." Well, depending on where you lived that is. The above examples I'm told were popular in Swedish SNES magazines of the time.

Mode 7 wowed us with pseudo-3D japery, but in reality it was little more than a massive flat image being rotated, panned and zoomed; close up the imagery became a deranged mass of blocky pixels – we can't even bring our eyes to look upon the original *Pilotwings* anymore, for fear of sullying our memories. But hark, oh fellow pad junkies, for there are some Mode 7 games which can still captivate despite their now archaic means of display.

The racing genre was well served by Mode 7, with two excellent examples. The first was *F-Zero*, a futuristic racer which focused on driving skill and straight-line racing, which is regarded as a classic. It was minimalist in design, uncluttered and refined, but it lacked a two-player mode. Two years later Nintendo released *Super Mario Kart*, the complete (though complimentary) antithesis to *F-Zero*; it was the other side to the racing coin and balanced things out nicely.

SMK featured more intense and frenetic racing; it had short-cuts, sudden speed-depleting crashes, wild wacky weapons, and a roster of Nintendo characters. It also kick-started the hyper-cute, super-deformed, karting-racer sub-genre, bringing it right into the masses' faces and making them love it. The one-player mode was excellent and provided a great challenge, either through the standard Grand Prix or Time Trial modes. But the real draw for the game was its two-player modes: Grand Prix co-op, standard racing, or the ultimate destroyer of friendships, BATTLE MODE! How can anyone claim to have been a SNES gamer if they'd never experienced this magical rite of passage? There's nothing quite like shooting a red shell into your best friend in Battle Course 2, and then grabbing a feather to jump into the nearby barriers thereby protecting yourself from their vengeful wrath.





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THE MAKING OF

SUPER STAR WARS TRILOGY

Even now, the Super Star Wars games remain the only movie trilogy to make it onto a single console. Mike Bevan speaks to director Kalani Streicher to discover the secrets of the epic platform saga

IN THE KNOW

- **» PUBLISHER:** JVC/NINTENDO
- **» DEVELOPER:** LUCASARTS/ SCUPLTURED SOFTWARE
- **» RELEASED:** 1992-1994
- **» PLATFORM:** SUPER NINTENDO
- **» GENRE:** PLATFORM/SPACE COMBAT

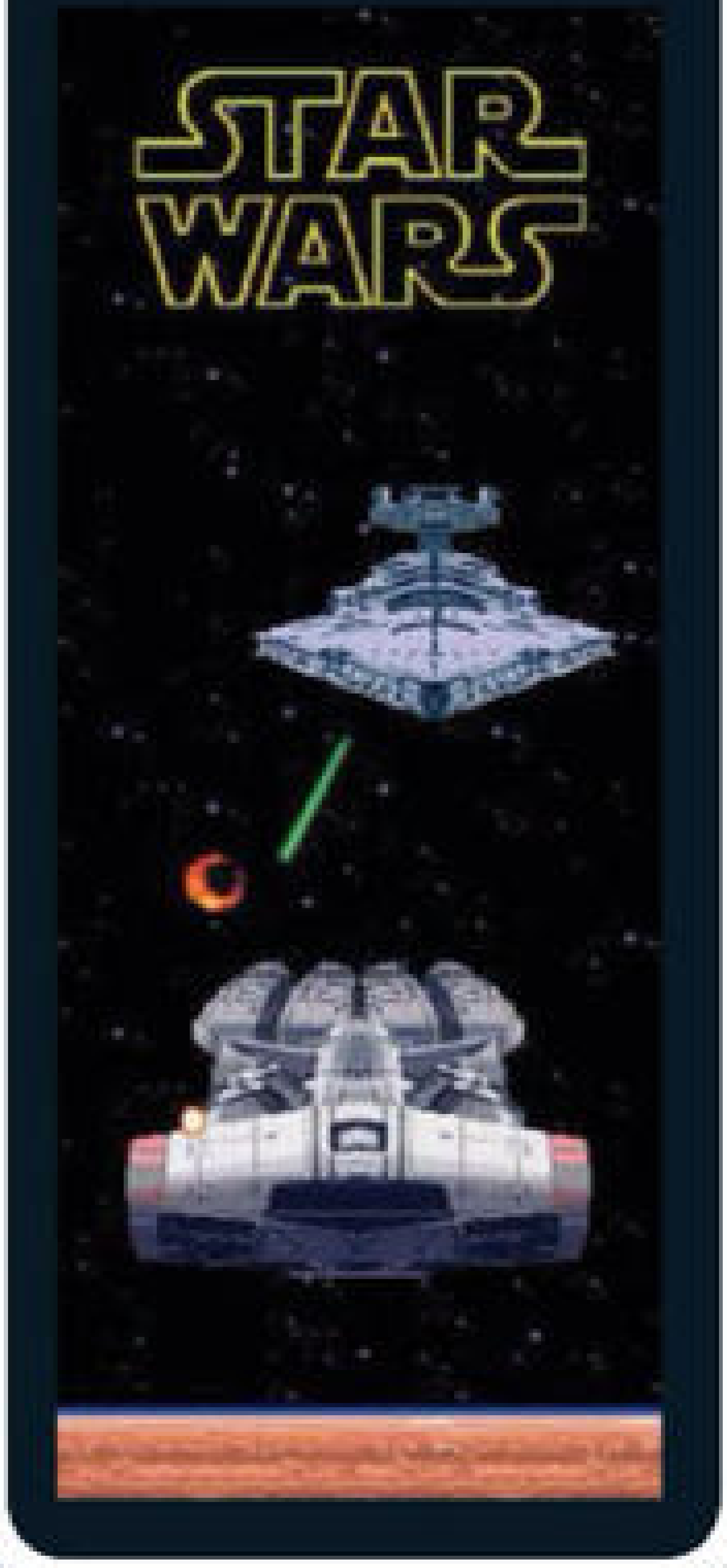
Cast your mind back to a time not so long ago when the Super Nintendo and Sega Mega Drive were the game console kings, and a certain Mr. Lucas had given us a mere three instalments of his interstellar movie juggernaut; the bonafide sci-fi classics *Star Wars* and *The Empire Strikes Back*, and another one with Ewoks. Released in 1992, *Super Star Wars* was a state-of-the-art mix of platform action and 3D shoot-'em-up sections, culminating in the famous X-Wing trench run – arguably the closest interactive experience the film franchise had yet seen. It became a major ace in the sleeve for Nintendo's battle against arch-rival Sega, and a future benchmark for action games on the SNES.

"I started working at Lucasfilm Games in 1988 as a designer/programmer," recalls Kalani Streicher, producer and lead designer of the *Super Star Wars* trilogy. "At the time they were trying to expand into the European markets and looking for someone who was fluent in German. I fitted the bill and they hired me immediately. My first project was *Zak McKracken And The Alien Mindbenders* with lead designer David Fox. As we were finishing the game I started working on porting and localising all of the story games such as *Maniac Mansion* and *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade* into various European languages on a variety of platforms." After building up and managing LucasArts' localisation department, and a brief programming stint on Brian Moriarty's *Loom*, Kalani finally asked the question many working at the company had been itching to for years. Lucasfilm had previously shied away from entering *Star Wars* territory for its gaming releases, the nearest it had come being an abandoned attempt at a point-and-click adventure from Hal Barwood, designer of *Indiana Jones And The Fate of Atlantis*.

"Lucasfilm was very focused on the PC platforms, such as the IBM, Mac, Amiga and Atari ST," explains Kalani. "A bunch of us wanted to work on console games and a handful of them wanted to work on *Star Wars*, including myself. Basically we asked our manager, Steve Arnold, 'Why aren't we on console, and why aren't we developing *Star Wars* games for it?" He replied, 'Do you guys want to do it? Go for it!' And off we

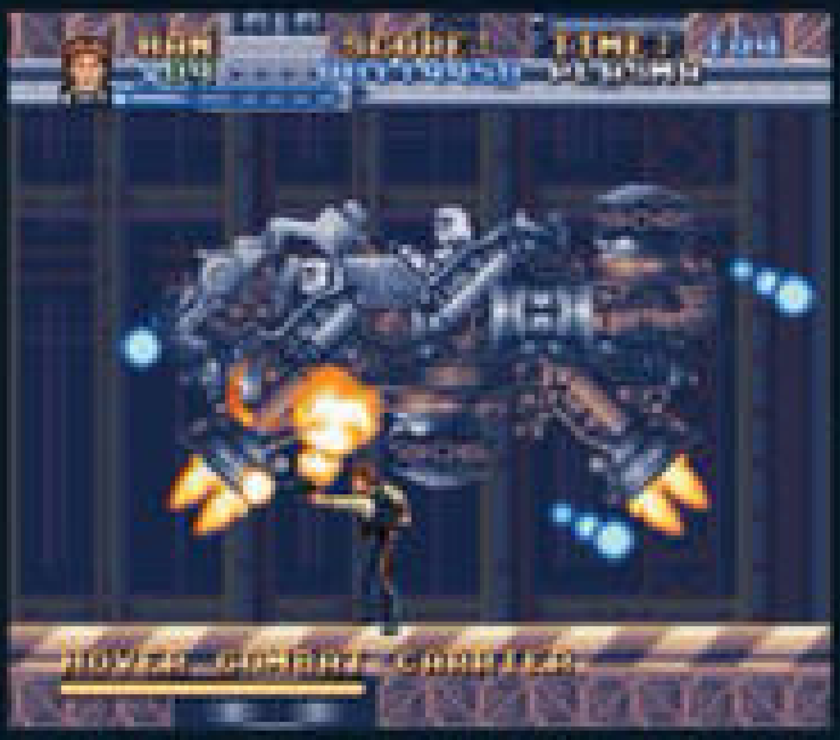
IN THE BEGINNING

"YOU CAN'T START a *Star Wars* game without the crawler. That's inconceivable!" says Kalani of his homage to the famous opening of *A New Hope*. "I wanted the game to start exactly the same way as the movie, with the text crawler and the camera pan to the spaceship and planet. I wanted the player to truly believe they were watching a movie and immersing themselves immediately in becoming Luke Skywalker. The in-game cut-scenes were directly from the movies and/or photo archives. For me, the cut-scenes had the purpose of grounding the player to the authenticity of the movies, and then let them interact and explore the environments as they were playing the levels"

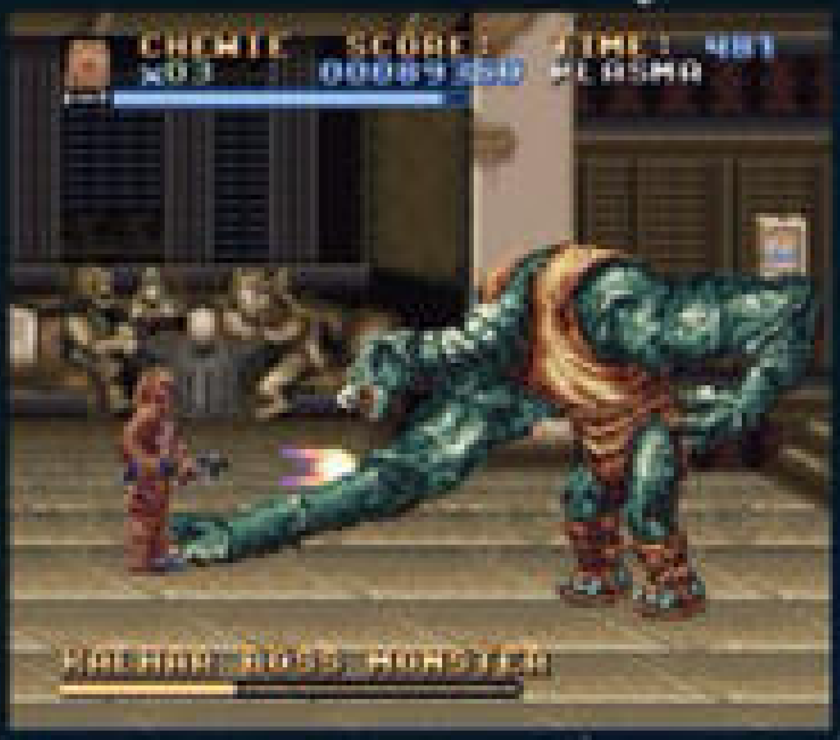


went building a *Star Wars* game for console." Kalani teamed up with Utah-based developer Sculptured Software, producing *Star Wars* for the NES, a platform action game based on the plot of the first movie which became a template for the later Super Nintendo title and its sequels, *Super Star Wars: Empire Strikes Back* and *Return Of The Jedi*. The relationship with Sculptured would remain for all three Super Nintendo games.

"My vision was to create the first trilogy on a single platform for our fans," Kalani tells us. "We were slightly behind the curve getting onto the SNES, though in the end we pulled off the release of each game from the *Star Wars* trilogy back-to-back, year after year, which I'm very proud of." As an avid gamer himself, Kalani demonstrates admirable taste when revealing the titles that inspired his first Super Nintendo project. "I was a big fan of platform games and side-scrollers," he says. "*Contra, Super Castlevania, Turrican* and *Mega Man* on SNES were my favourite games. I was also playing the *Willow* arcade game, which inspired me to push the visual quality on the SNES above other games. I wanted it to be as good a side-scroller as *Contra* or *Castlevania*, with the visual quality of arcade games such as *Willow* or *Street Fighter*, and vehicle gameplay using Mode 7 as seen in *F-Zero*."



» [SNES] Nothing's gonna stop Han getting to the Millenium Falcon; not even whatever this thing is.

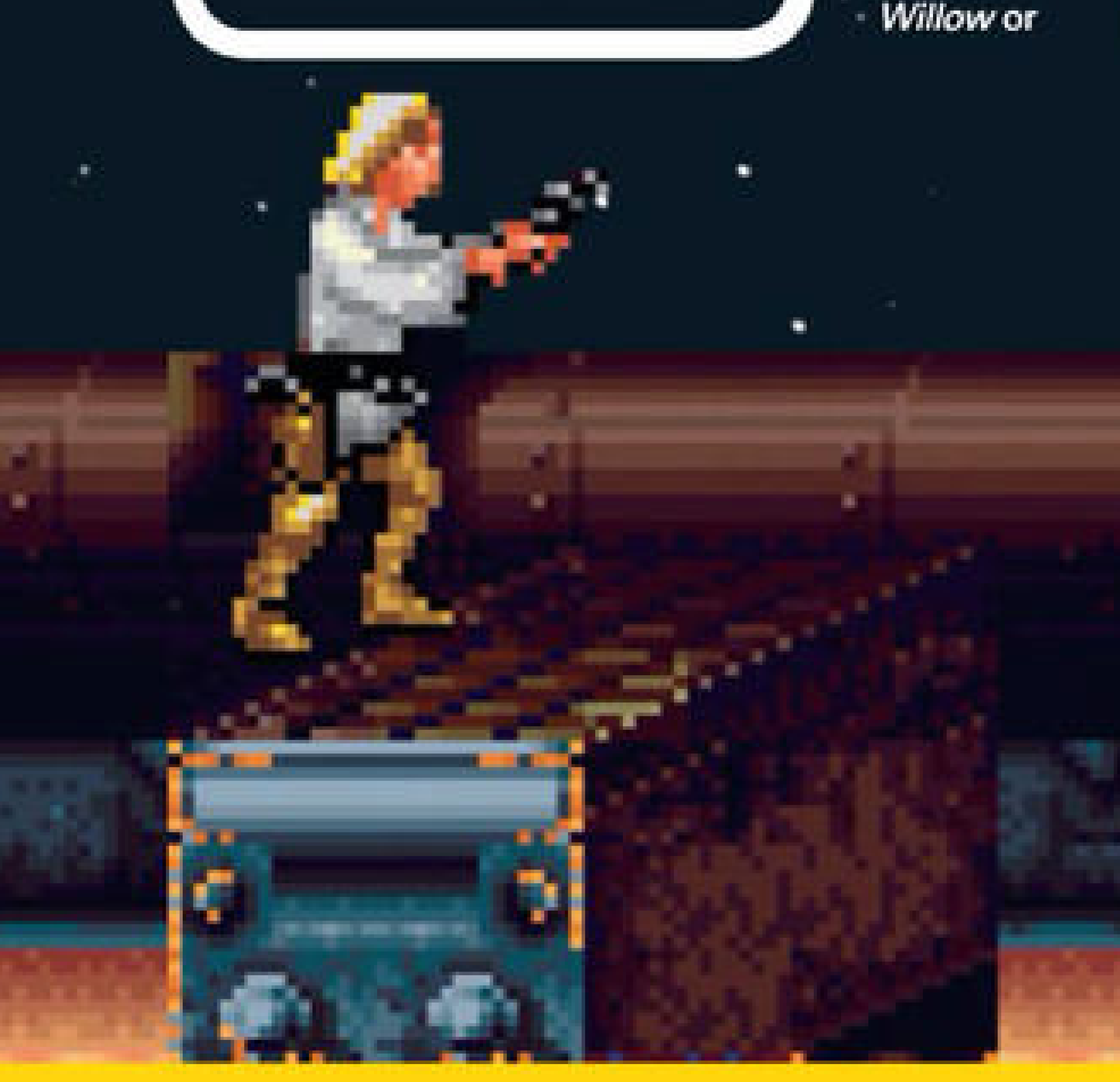


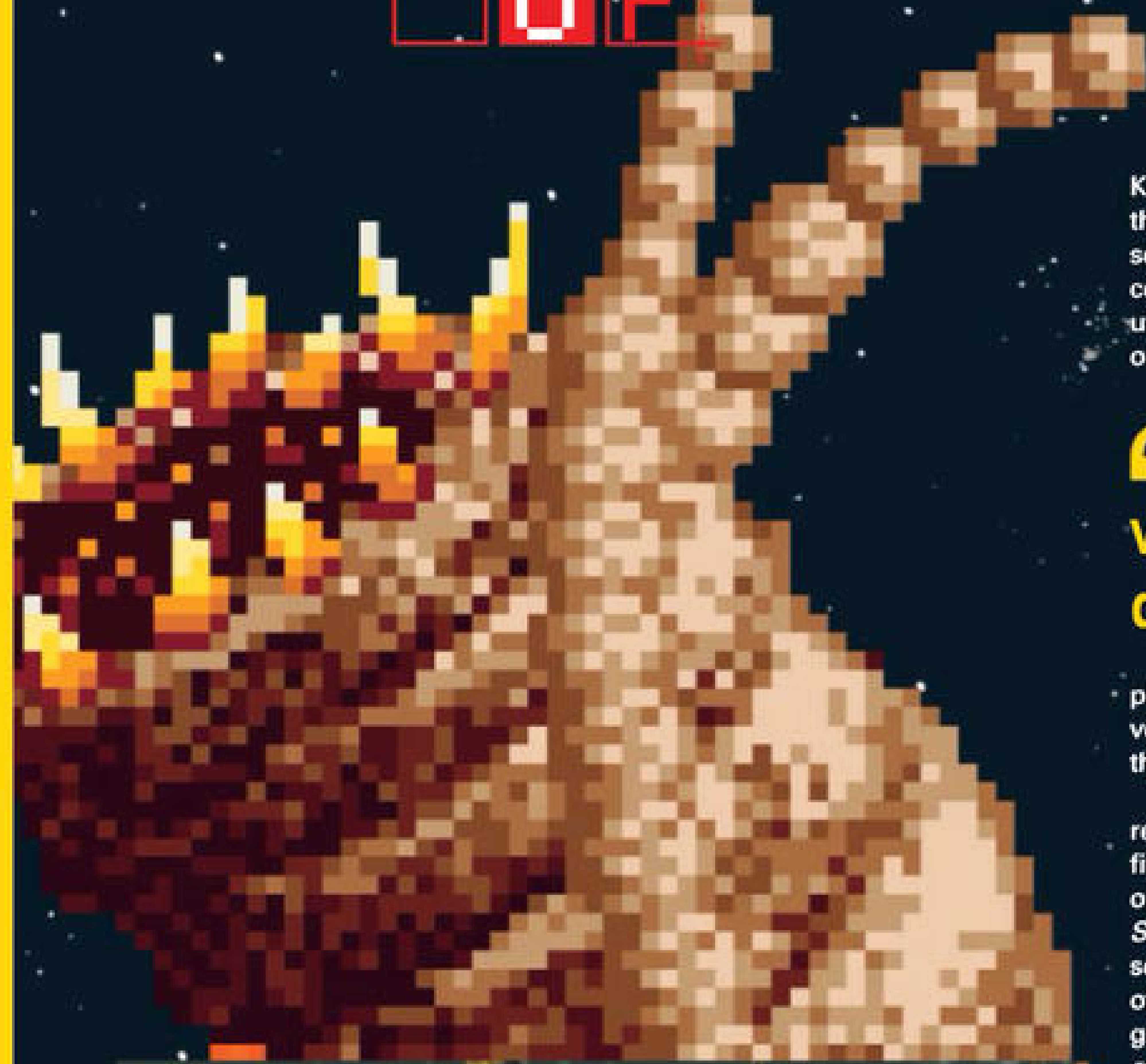
» [SNES] The Cantina boss is based on one of the creatures in the film's holographic chess set.

> **We were the first to combine genres of side-scroller and third/first-person vehicle-combat for the SNES**

Mode 7, the Super Nintendo's unique and much-touted graphics mode, allows for the rapid manipulation and scaling of a background 'landscape', the first instance in *Super Star Wars* being the early landspeeder stage, as Luke travels towards a Sandcrawler encountering a bunch of really annoying Jawas. Though primitive by modern standards, the use of this technique made recreating seminal vehicular *Star Wars* moments possible in a way that wowed gamers of the time. Later series highlights would include the Hoth Snowspeeder vs. AT-AT battles of *Super Empire Strikes Back*, and the gripping dash of the Millennium Falcon through the bowels of the unfinished Death Star Mk II in *Super Return Of The Jedi*.

"I wanted to allow players to interact with their favourite *Star Wars* vehicles in third or



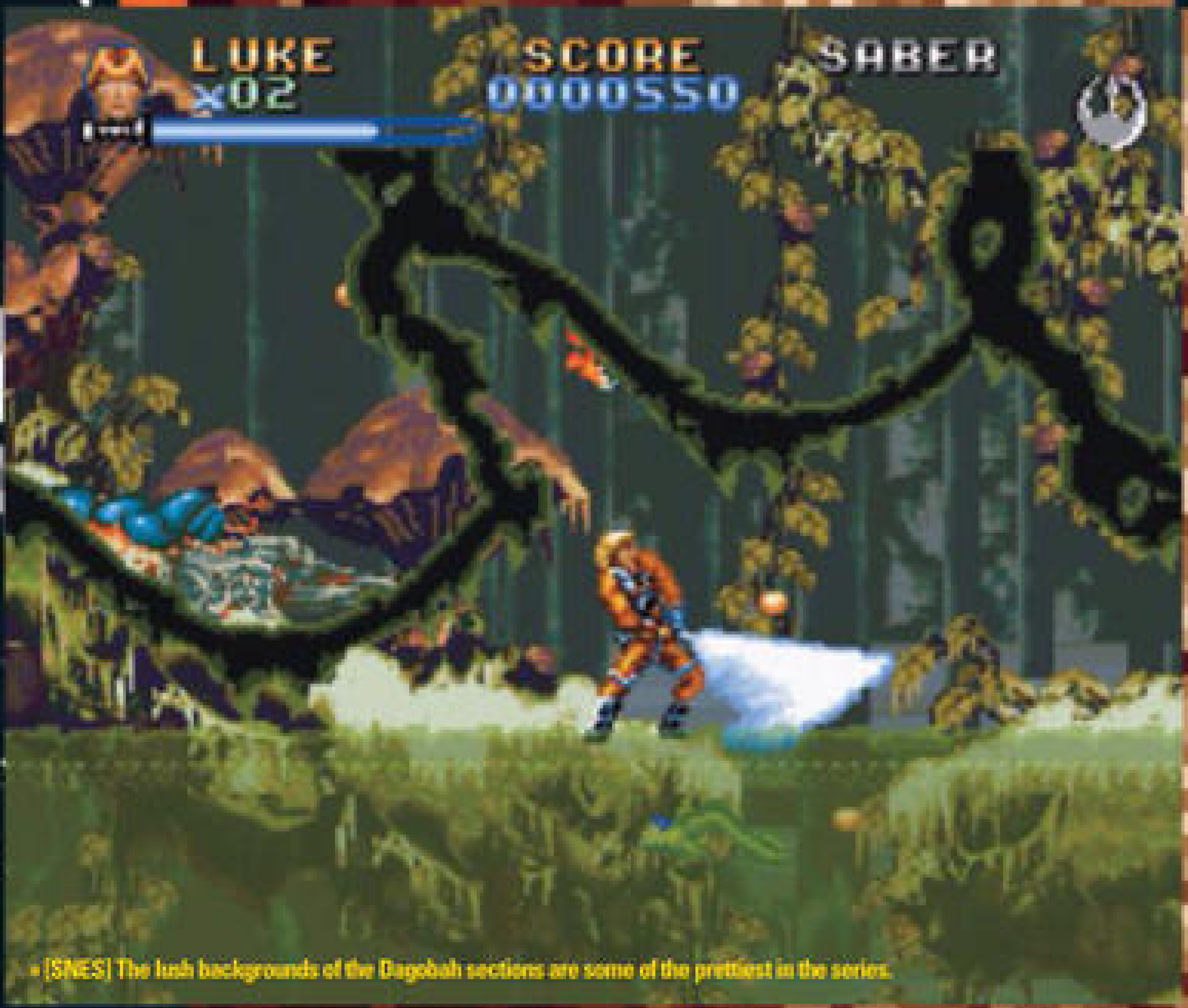


first-person perspective, and experience the different aspects they'd seen in the movies," says Kalani. "You might say we were the first to combine genres of side-scroller and third/first-person vehicle combat for the SNES. I didn't want to utilise the vehicles in a side-scrolling or top-down fashion. I wanted the player to feel like they were in the vehicle racing across the desert or through the galaxy."

> **"I wanted the player to feel like they were in the vehicle racing across the desert or through the galaxy"**

Indeed, the series succeeds in recreating the atmosphere of the films remarkably well, from the opening text crawl over Tatooine in *Super Star Wars*, to the Lucas-esque screen wipes and imposing rendition of John Williams' score. Each game closely follows the plot of the relevant film, transitioning through platform sections with memorable bosses like the Sarlacc Pit Monster, Boba Fett, and the Rancor, and interspersed with story-progressing cut-scenes. With a rich tapestry of characters, creatures and vehicles to draw on from the films, the team took pride in attempting to present as authentic a *Star Wars* console experience as possible. "I looked at every aspect of the movie in detail with the team and pointed out the environments and characters I wanted in the game," says Kalani. "We used reference materials and photos from Lucasfilm's photo library, and took reference pictures of the actual movie models from the Lucas Archives. Everybody on the team was a hardcore *Star Wars* fan. I was also producing the *X-Wing* game at the same time, which added even more extensive research of every spacecraft and ship in the game. I was heavily entrenched in getting the authenticity of the *Star Wars* universe into these games."

"Though from the beginning I wanted to retell the story of the movies in an interactive fashion," he continues, "I also knew, being the *Star Wars* geek myself, that I wanted to bring in elements that never were explained or expanded upon in the movies, especially areas or characters that were mentioned briefly in the films, such as fighting the *Star Wars* chess monster as a boss in the Cantina." Kalani is quick to praise what he describes as the "terrific relationship" between Lucasfilm and Sculptured Software over the course of the three games. "We were in control of all creative aspects of the game such as game design, art and animation, and Sculptured was responsible for coding the game," he explains. "Sculptured had a great engine, tools and development kits that allowed us to rapidly create levels and character animation. [Lead programmer] Peter Ward at Sculptured was an incredible engineer and a true *Star Wars* fan. I had such a blast working with him. Initially I created a design document outlining all specification and progression of the levels, characters and vehicles from the first to last



» [SNES] The lush backgrounds of the Dagobah sections are some of the prettiest in the series.

»[SNES] Moseying around Mos Eisley offered a whole lot of shades of beige to enjoy.

IMPERIAL DEFENSE DROID

» [SNES] This ED-209-looking lumbering monstrosity guards the Death Star hanger bay.

» [SNES] Han attempts to escape the Carbonite freezing chamber. Hasn't he watched *Empire's* ending?

»[SNES] For *Star Wars* nerds, Boba Fett's Slave 1 is pretty much the coolest boss in the game.

level. We then did storyboards for the plot progression, cinematics and story panels. My concept and art lead Harrison Fong storyboarded a lot of them, which we then passed on to the team and converted it into digital artwork."

In the original *Super Star Wars*, one of the early stand-out platform stages involves Luke making his way to the top of a massive Sandcrawler brimming with hostile turrets and yet more pesky Jawas. "We did several iterations on the Sandcrawler and wanted to make the player feel like they were climbing up a huge vehicle and that the level was moving as you are jumping from platform to platform, "says Kalani. Later stages give players an opportunity to control alternate heroes, such as Chewbacca in the Cantina stage, or Han Solo taking on hordes of slightly inept stormtroopers en route to the Falcon in Mos Eisley. A ride in Han's iconic galactic rustbucket, a daring rescue, and a brush with a trash compacter later the famous Death Star run awaits you. "We knew from the start that we had to have this level, and this was the climax of the game," says Kalani of the famous X-Wing sequence. "It had to live up to the then-in-the-arcades *Star Wars* game trench run. The SNES and its Mode 7 feature were perfect for this and allowed us to give the player an incredible climactic moment."

Working with Mode 7 graphics proved very much a mixture of trial and error on *Super Star Wars*. "It was our first attempt to utilise Mode 7 in a different way than other games," Kalani explains. "The landspeeder stage had to show progression, moving across a desert towards the mountains in the distance. It was a fine balance of sprite usage for the terrain, enemy characters and distant parallaxing of the mountain range. We had to take that one step further with the X-Wing level, flying across the surface and then down the trench allowing the player to be able to move anywhere in space. And lastly integrating the Millenium Falcon took several iterations. It is such a unique ship that we fairly quickly ran out of sprites/tiles. We had to pull off every trick we had in the book for those sections." One interesting side note Kalani offers is that the atmospheric platform section set inside the Death Star nearly didn't make it into the finished game. "That level was difficult to pull off and barely avoided the chopping block," he remembers. "I remember contemplating many times cutting it, but I am glad that we found a way to make it work and keep it in the game."

For the sequels, Lucasflim and Sculptured continued to refine their game engine, packing in ever more content and visual advancements with the help of increased cartridge capacities. The series finale, *Super Return of the Jedi*, was the largest; with its 16-Megabit cart it was twice the size of the original *Super Star Wars*. The desire to innovate and improve was not without its share of technical stumbling blocks. "We were constantly pushing the SNES and adding as much content as possible from the *Star Wars* universe from one game to another, challenging and trying to outdo ourselves each time. In *Super Empire* the most challenging parts were of course the AT-AT /snowspeeder levels and the Millennium Falcon. These are iconic vehicles that needed to behave and feel like they did in the movie.

"For the AT-AT sequence, using Mode 7 for such a big vehicle was difficult. We were definitely pushing the capabilities of the SNES hardware. The cable release and circling of the snowspeeder was incredibly hard. We spent many long hours refining the gameplay to make it work. And in *Super Jedi* the speeder bike scene and final flight through the inside of the Death Star wasn't easy. For the speeder bike

GO TO
PUSH PULL
OPEN CLOSE
GET USE
NEW KID TURN ON

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

MANIAC MANSION (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: VARIOUS CONSOLES AND COMPUTERS
YEAR: 1987

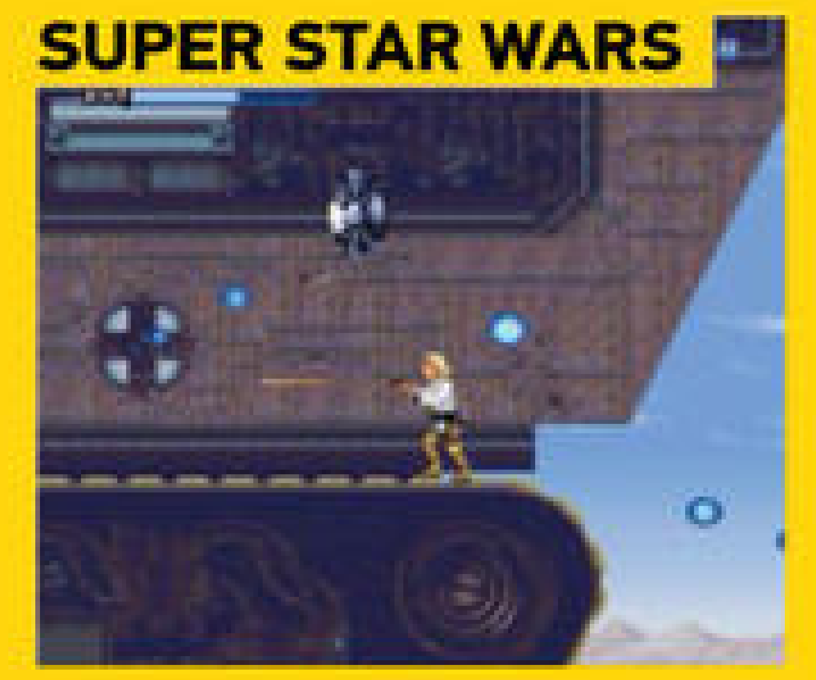
THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND
SYSTEM: VARIOUS CONSOLES AND COMPUTERS
YEAR: 1990

INDIANA JONES AND THE FATE OF ATLANTIS
SYSTEM: PC DOS, MAC, AMIGA
YEAR: 1992

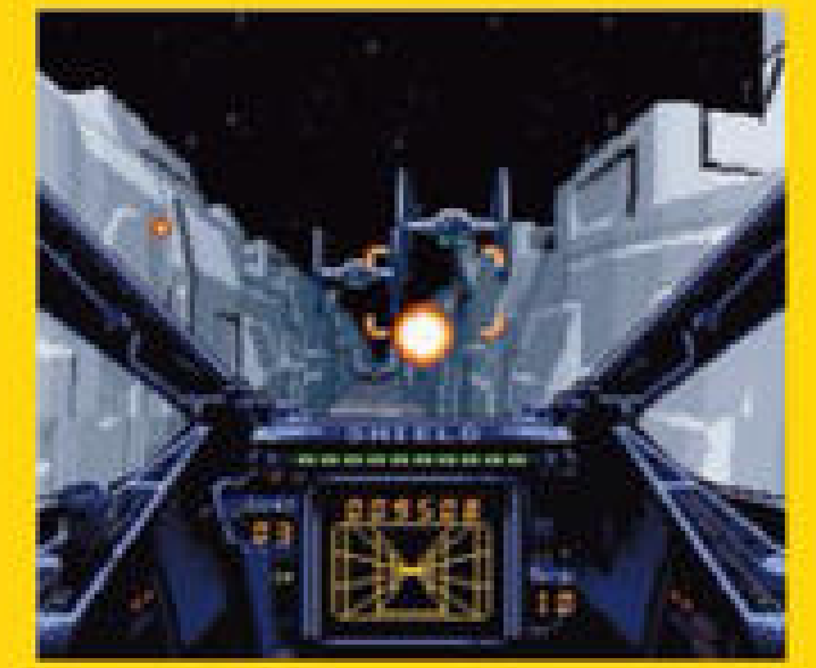
X-WING
SYSTEM: PC DOS, MAC
YEAR: 1993

HEART-STOPPING MOMENTS

SUPER STAR WARS

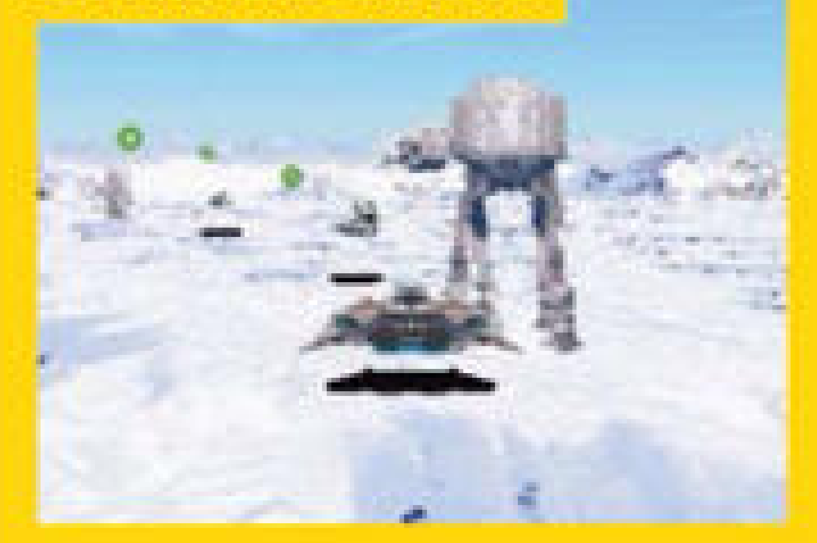


R2-D2 has been captured by Jawas, and Luke must battle to the top of an enormous Sandcrawler, then through its dingy, hazardous innards to rescue him.

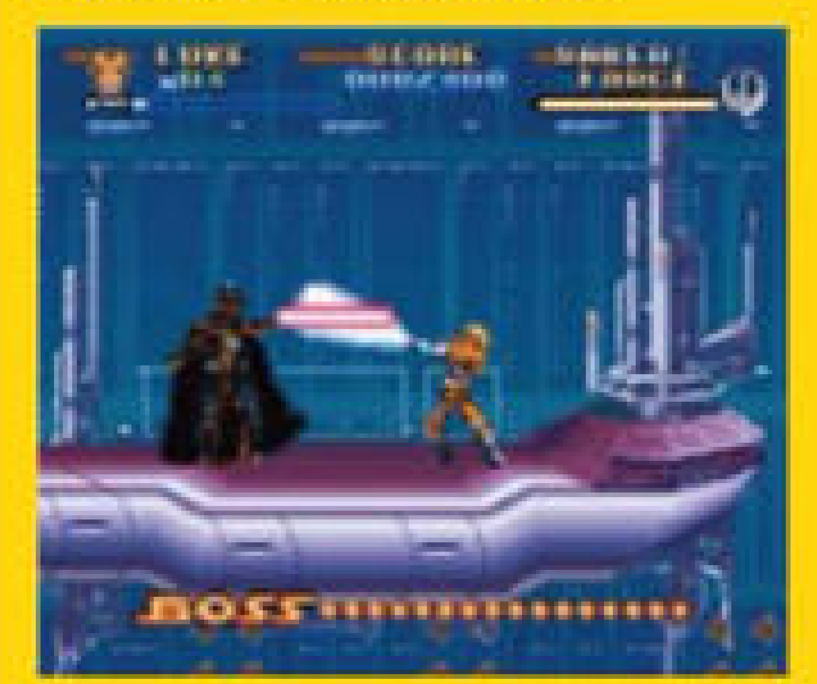


From farm boy to starship pilot, young Skywalker's final challenge is the terrifying Death Star trench, and a face-off with Vader's TIE Advanced.

SUPER EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

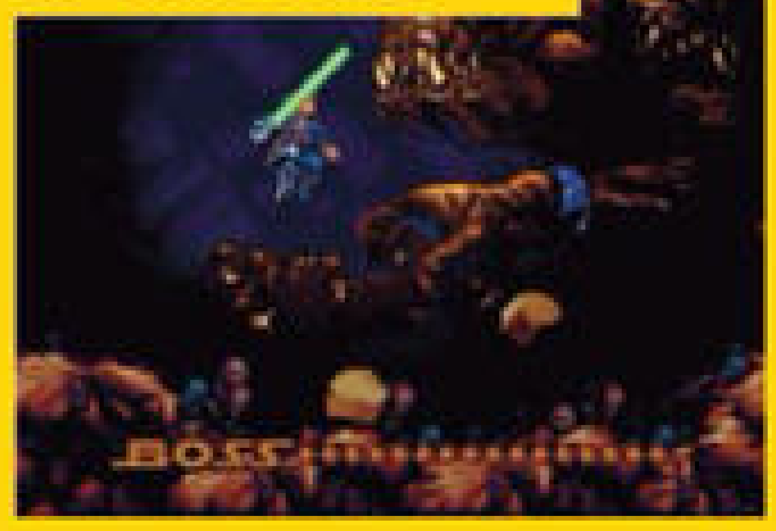


As the Empire attacks the Rebel base on Hoth, Luke grabs a snowspeeder and attempts to take down an incoming battalion of giant AT-AT walkers.

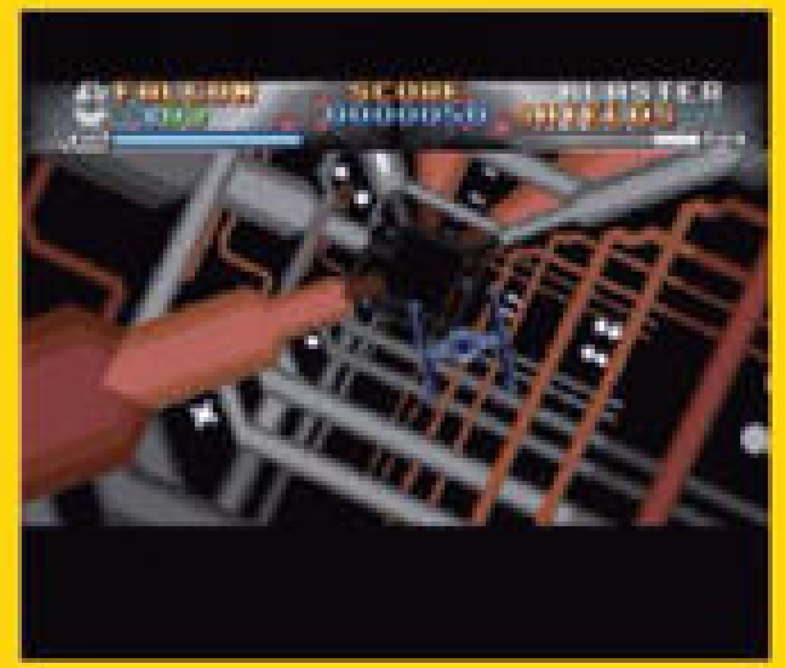


The climactic showdown high on the gantries of Bespin sees Luke having to draw upon all his newly-acquired Jedi skills in order to defeat his old man.

SUPER RETURN OF THE JEDI



Mean, bad-tempered and certainly no oil-painting, the Rancor will leave you wondering if breaking into Jabba's palace was such a good idea after all.



In the Millennium Falcon, Lando Calrissian redeems himself with a daring raid on the unfinished Death Star II in the memorable finale of the saga.

chase the most difficult part was creating believable trees moving past at high speeds. Because of the difficulty I considered many other design perspectives such as isometric or top-down views, but they never felt as dramatic as the Mode 7 version."

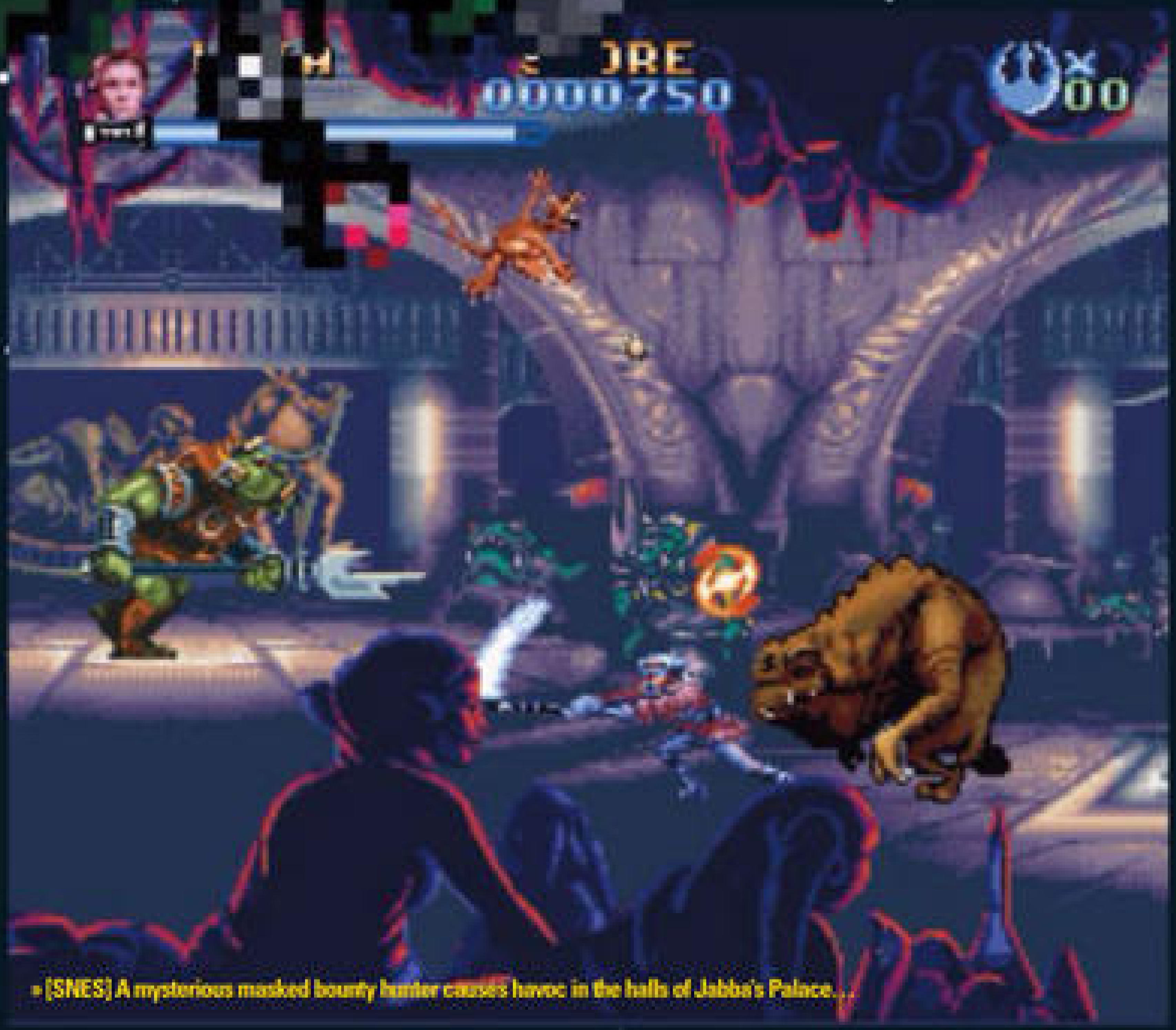
One gameplay aspect that was greatly improved for both sequels was the addition of RPG-style character development, with Luke gradually gaining a number of useful Force Powers including the ability to heal, levitate, deflect attacks or even mind control enemies. The downside is that powers can be only be collected from certain locations in each game, meaning they can be easily missed by the not-so prudent Jedi. "Balancing the Force Powers wasn't easy," admits Kalani. "We had to anticipate players getting through a level with or without them. For me it was an integral part of character evolution and player progression (levelling up of a character) in adding Force Powers in *Super Empire* and *Super Jedi*."

For *Super Empire Strikes* back, the initial platform stages on Hoth added an extra dimension of difficulty due to the slippy-slidey nature of the planet's icy terrain. "This was our first attempt to add a 'slippery' factor to gameplay," Kalani comments. "It was difficult to test because of the many ways to slide into objects and assure proper collision. We also had to work hard on making the tiling of ice pieces look organic and not too repetitive. I enjoyed all the levels and am glad we added Han Solo and Chewie throughout these levels." However, these stages, along with some of the more sprawling, hazard-filled levels and increasingly fearsome bosses of both sequels, still attract criticism over their degree of difficulty, despite the addition of level passcodes.

"I get that a lot," chuckles Kalani. "These were difficult games. We were aiming at the hardcore. Everybody was a hardcore player back then! I definitely could not deliver such difficult games today. In hindsight, I would reduce the enemy damage by 10-20 per cent, make the player character able to absorb more damage, add more power-ups and improve level design. Though I wouldn't want to make it too easy – it has to be challenging. The player needs to feel like they are earning the Force. My excuse for the difficulty of those games in Yoda's words is: 'You are not a Jedi yet. Much training you will need!'"

Overall, Kalani tells us that there really isn't that much he would change about his SNES gaming trilogy in hindsight. "I'm very happy how the games turned out," he admits. "We did an incredible job getting this trilogy out back-to-back each Christmas. There are a couple of elements I wish we could have incorporated if we would have had more time, such as all the levels, characters and bosses we had to cut from the game – with each game we built more levels than we actually shipped. I'd also make the games a bit easier to play. I'm very fond of the *Super Star Wars* trilogy and very pleased with its popularity. They were my very first games and we had such fun designing and developing them."

RG thought it might be fun to ask Kalani if, like us, he had any favourites out of the many memorable *Star Wars* moments found across the trilogy. "There are so many favourite moments," he replies. "A lot of them had to do with gameplay as well as the technical challenges they presented. In *Super Star Wars* my favourites are the landspeeder and trench run levels. In *Super Empire* it's definitely the snowspeeder/ AT-AT level. Who doesn't



» [SNES] A mysterious masked bounty hunter causes havoc in the halls of Jabba's Palace…

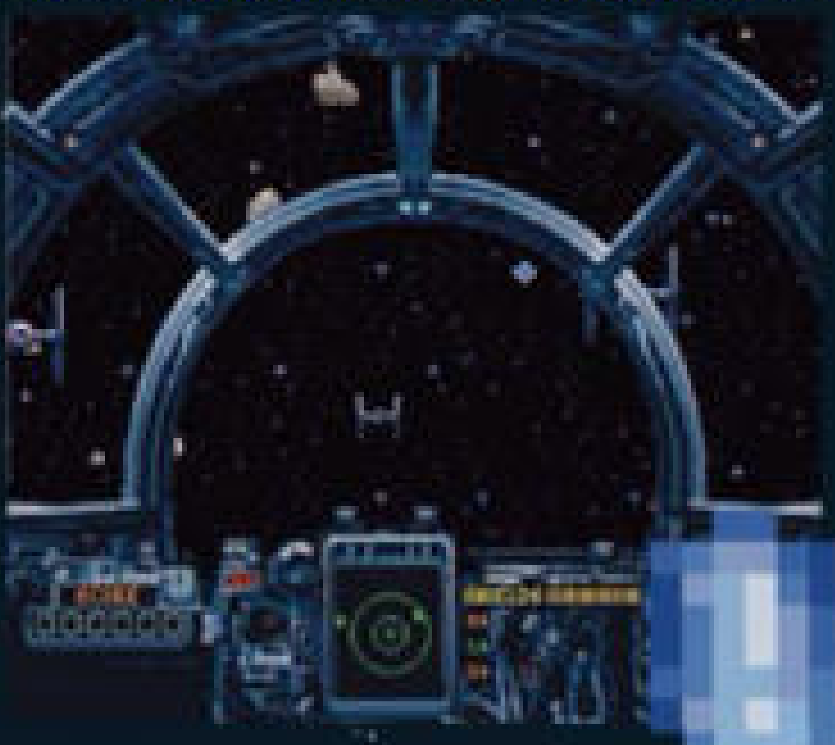
“These were difficult games. We were aiming at the hardcore. Everybody was a hardcore player back then! ”

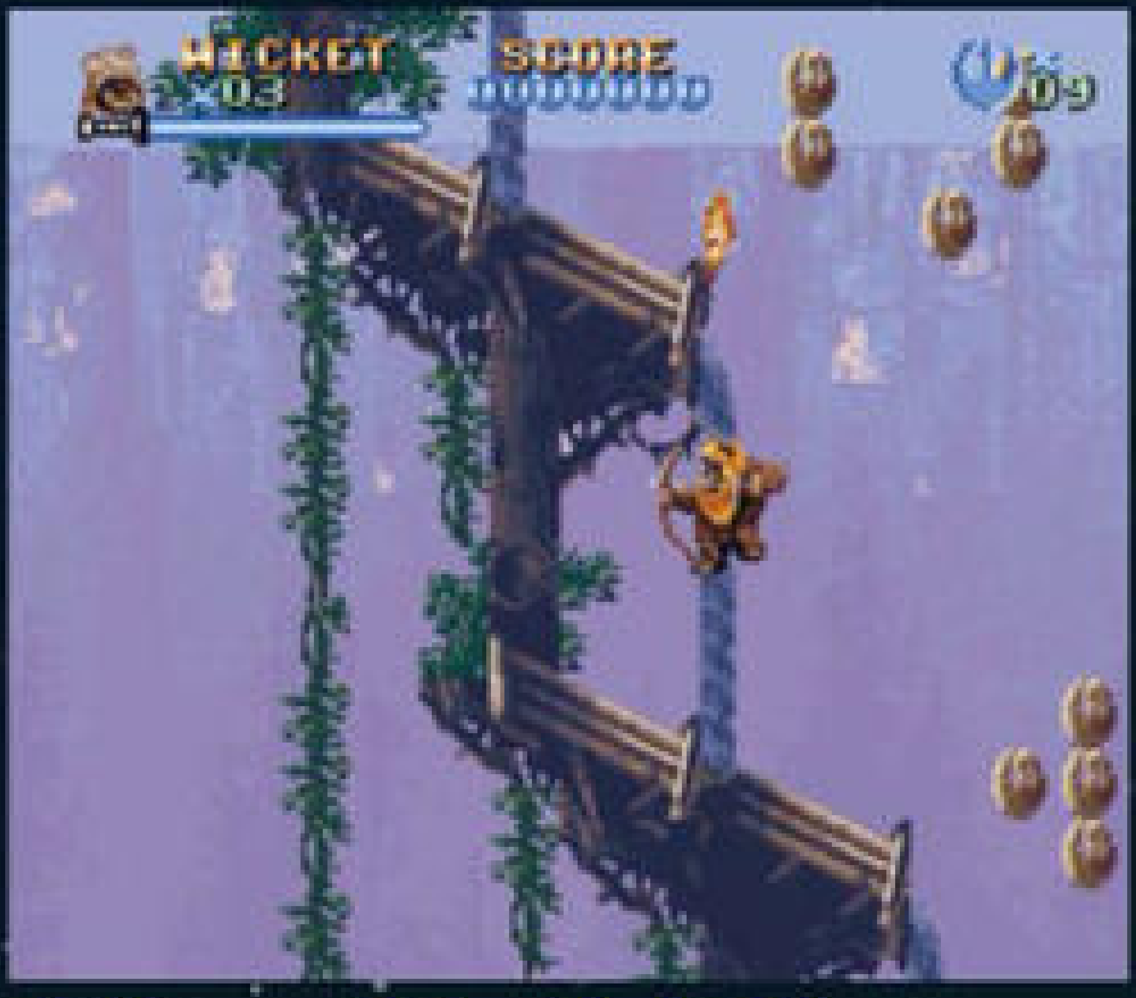
WHAT THE PRESS SAID

"THERE'S A MINI *Star Wars* revival on right now, bringing with it lots of good things – books, a fab comic, one brilliant PC game (*X-Wing*) and this, not only the best film game on the SNES, but a real contender for best of its type on any system."
SUPER STAR WARS IMPORT REVIEW, SUPER PLAY, FEBRUARY 1993

"TAKING ONLY MINOR liberties with the plot of the film, *Super Star Wars* is a milestone in movie tie-ins which shows just how this type of game should be done. The best soundtracks and spot effects ever heard on the SNES combine with graphics and stunning cut sequences to recreate a real feeling of playing the movie."
NINTENDO MAGAZINE SYSTEM, FEBRUARY 1993

» [SNES] *Super Empire Strikes Back* puts you behind the controls of the iconic Millennium Falcon for the first time.





» [SNES] You too can control a hyperactive four-foot teddy bear.

want to take down and AT-AT? That was incredibly difficult, but we managed to pull it off. One of my favourite levels is also the Carbonite Freezing Chamber playing as Chewbacca. You had to keep moving and were fighting jet troopers, stormtroopers with shields and bombs, various bounty hunters and the little pesky Ugnaughts. The Darth Vader levels were also a treat. It's so emotional going up against Vader no matter how pixelated he looked. By this time the player had all of the different Forces accessible and Luke was at his most powerful. Jon Knowles, my animation supervisor, did an awesome job animating Darth with the limited sprites we had available."

"In *Super Jedi* it's definitely the Rancor. It's the biggest beast in the *Star Wars* universe, and so satisfying when you take it down. The sail-barge level was also exciting. For the first time we could create and show what the sail-barge looked like on the outside and inside. In addition, we were able to go up against a slew of bounty hunters and strange creatures. And you got to play Princess Leia with her chain weapon in a bikini! Then of course there are the final levels flying the Falcon inside the Death Star. The climax of the entire trilogy racing to the core and back out in the nick of time blasting the Death Star into a million pieces. Finally, the showdown with the Emperor was a fun level to design. The difficulty was in creating the scene with the round window. It took a lot of tiles to look right. And then giving the Emperor all of his lightning effect powers..."

Before his departure from LucasArts earlier this year, *Force Unleashed* producer Haden Blackman stated that he would have loved to see a modern revival of the *Super Star Wars* series. We wonder if Kalani would be game.

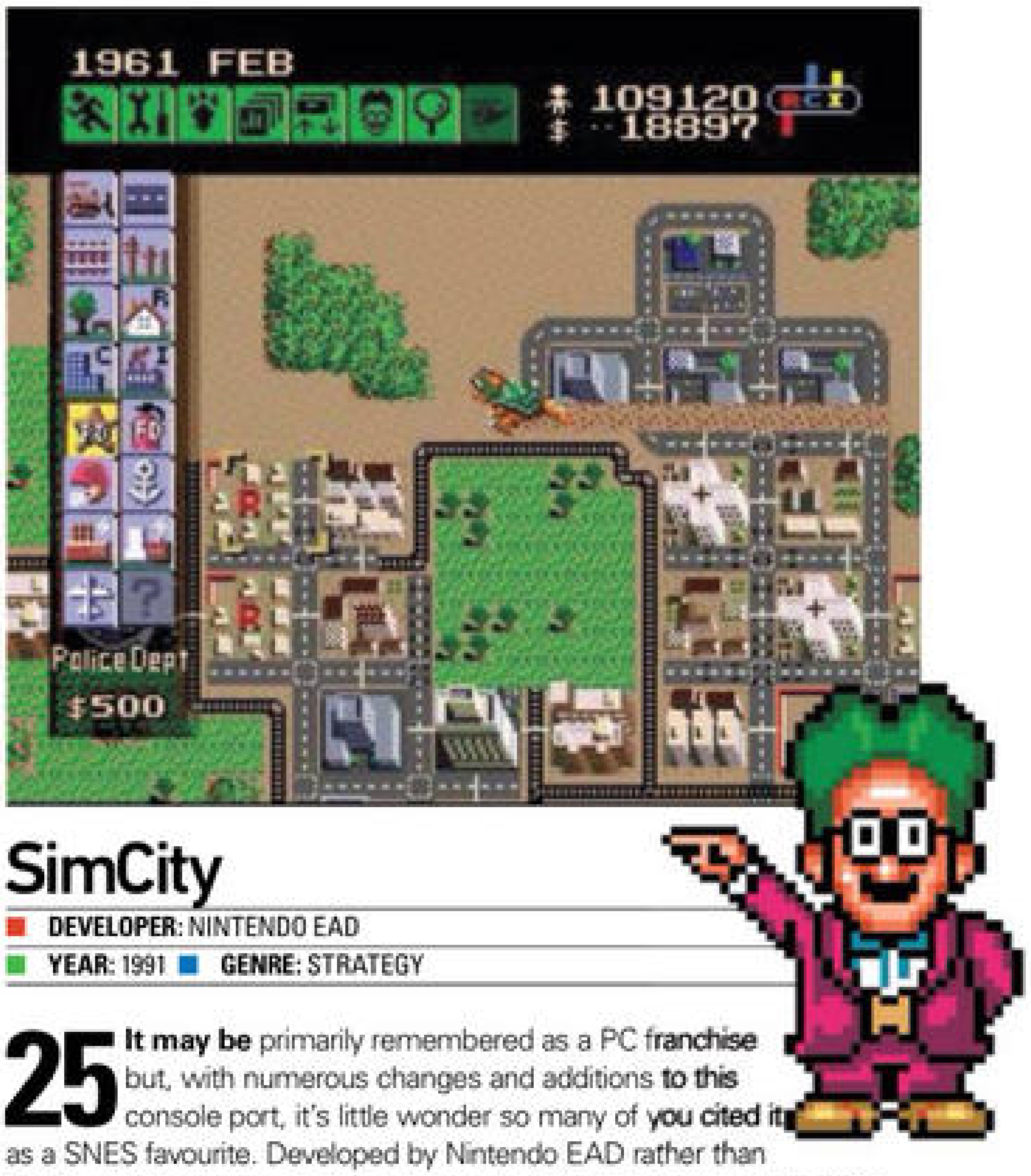
"Definitely, I'd be all over that project," Kalani enthuses. "It's the game that catapulted LucasArts into the console space and it can do it again on the new platforms. I've been trying to convince LucasArts to recreate the *Super Star Wars* trilogy for tablets, handhelds or Xbox Live Arcade/PSN. If given that opportunity I'd keep the essence of the original, though reinvent and innovate the game with today's gameplay mechanics, give it a visual facelift and, of course, pack it with even more *Star Wars* goodies including additional environments, characters, bosses and vehicles from the movie. I'd also add a mode where players can create additional content to the game, like *LittleBigPlanet*. Maybe readers could start petitioning LucasArts for a new *Super Star Wars* series on the new platforms. I'm totally up for it, and it will be even better than the original..."

SETTLE A SCORE

THE SUPERB RENDITION of the *Star Wars* theme music featured on the title screen of all three games in the trilogy was a feature that surprised Kalani as much as the rest of us. "We had an incredible audio technician on the team," he says. "I remember when I heard the *Star Wars* theme in the game for the first time. I literally said, 'Oh myGod, how did he do this and fit it on the SNES cartridge? It sounds identical to the movie!' It was incredible to hear it in the game and I was literally blown away. Hats off to Paul Webb at Sculptured for his dedication and passion in creating the best movie music score on the SNES. I still get comments today that the Super Nintendo score is the best on any console!"

TOP 25 SNES GAMES

Retro Gamer readers reveal their favourite ever SNES games. Find out if yours made the final cut



SimCity

DEVELOPER: NINTENDO EAD

YEAR: 1991 **GENRE:** STRATEGY

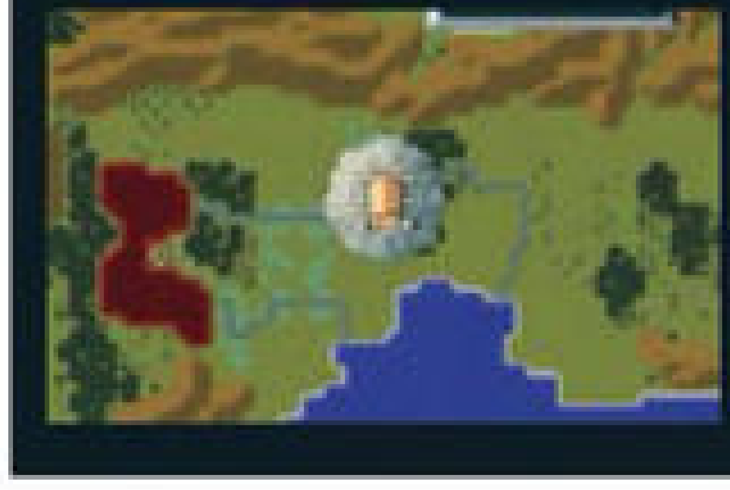
25 **It may be** primarily remembered as a PC franchise but, with numerous changes and additions to this console port, it's little wonder so many of you cited it as a SNES favourite. Developed by Nintendo EAD rather than Maxis, this version has a distinct Japanese flavour and several beautiful Nintendo twists – seeing Bowser stomp through the city is up there with the greatest gaming moments. The team did a great job of making it work with a controller rather than a mouse, too.

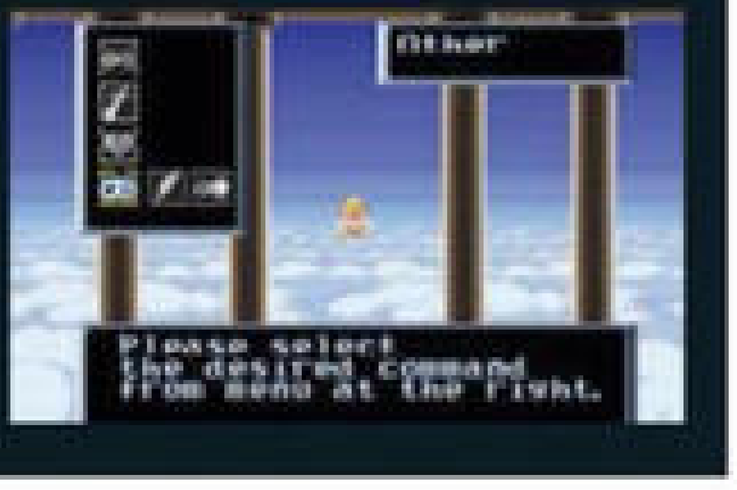
ActRaiser

DEVELOPER: QUINTET

YEAR: 1990 **GENRE:** STRATEGY/ACTION

24 **The beauty of** *ActRaiser* is that it is effectively two games in one. Half god game – albeit without any direct religious references, thanks to Nintendo's hard-line self-censorship of the time – half action game, all awesome. While it's true that neither part is a dedicated example of the genres in question, it's the unique fusion that makes this so memorable. Putting town creation and management on hold to go kick some ass is something that no other game can offer.



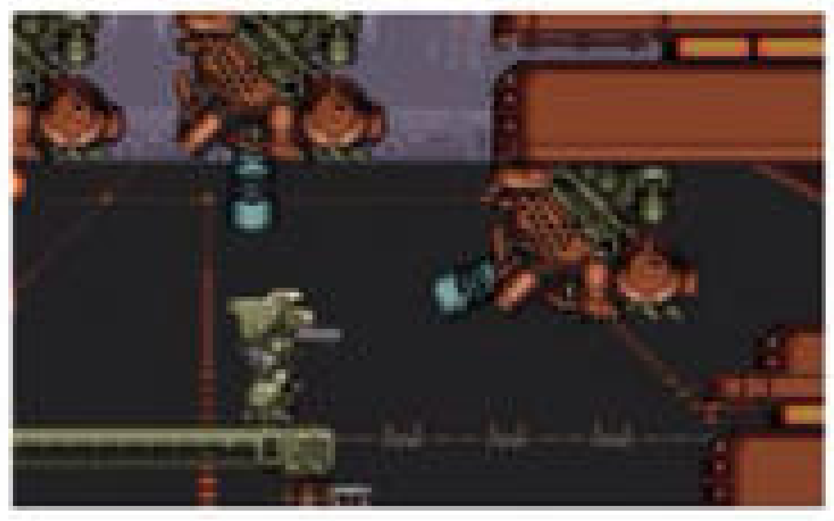


Cybernator

DEVELOPER: NCS CORP

YEAR: 1992 **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

23 **A surprisingly strong** showing in support of this shooter sees it make the list ahead of bona fide classics like *Super Punch-Out!*, but you've gotta love the underdog. It's an inventive mech shooter that really makes you feel like you're in control of a huge, complex piece of kit and it still holds up brilliantly today. The same can't be said of the budget PlayStation 2 remake, sadly – our advice would be to just stick with the original…



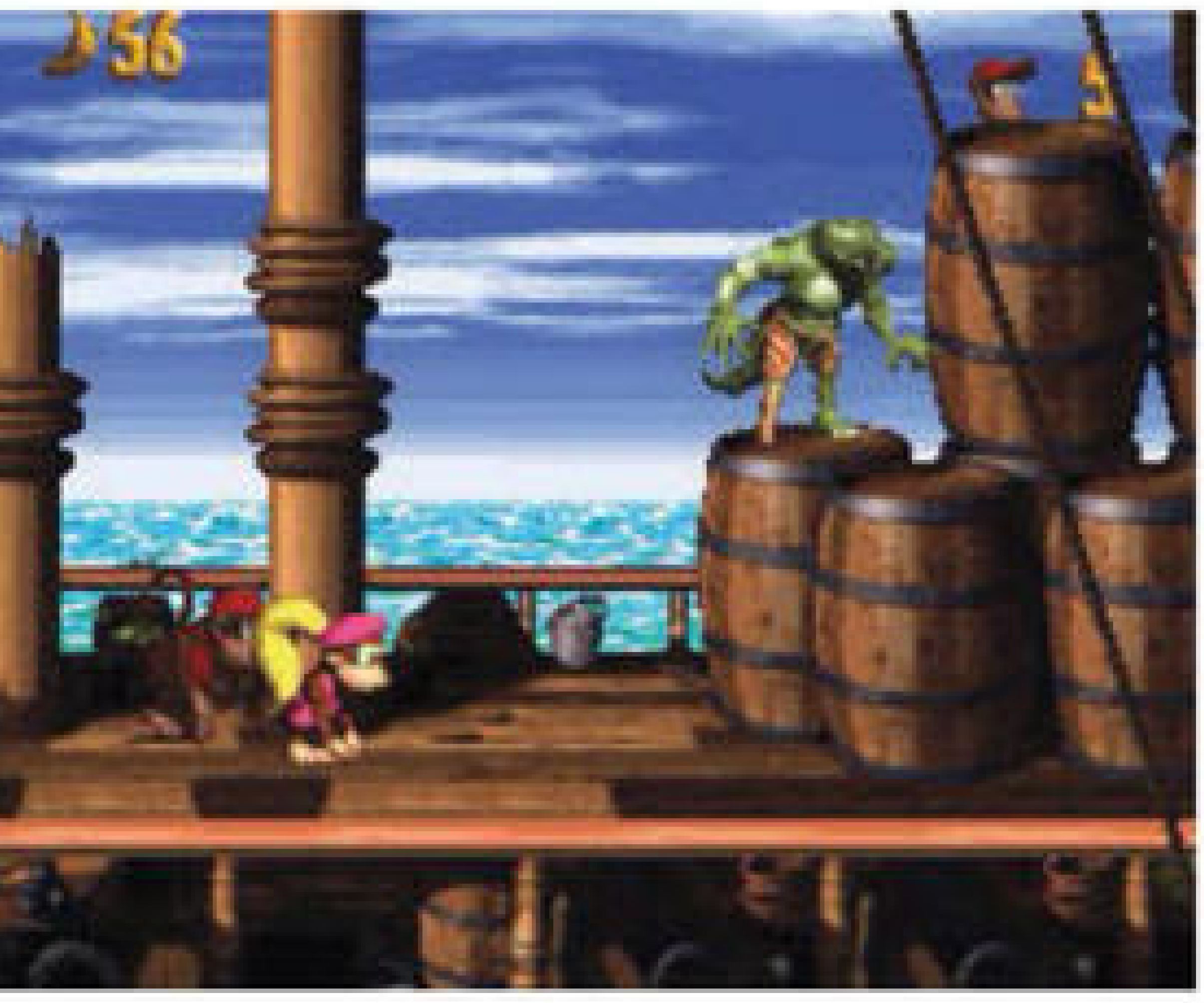
Zombies Ate My Neighbours

DEVELOPER: LUCASARTS
YEAR: 1993 **GENRE:** RUN-AND-GUN

22 **There's a lot** to be said for this B-movie shooter, so we're not overly surprised to see you come out in numbers to support it. The recent sad loss of LucasArts might have done something to bolster its following, but it's certainly not ill-deserved – the humour, style and tight gameplay are such that many modern developers would kill to put their name to something as polished and refined as this.

Perhaps the original great co-op game, *Zombies Ate My Neighbours* lets protagonists Zeke and Julie use anything they can find to hold off the zombie apocalypse and secure the safety of the guys and gals that live down the street. But it's not just zombies – variety here is exceptional and, over the course of the game, you'll find yourself gunning down pretty much every B-movie cliché – from giant ants to vampires and aliens. But it doesn't stop there, as the level with the gigantic rampaging baby perfectly displays. It keeps you guessing by constantly changing things up – even though gameplay changes little, that each stage can feel entirely unique is amazing.

Said variety extends beyond simply switching enemy sprites out for new ones, too. It's the weapons, an improvised arsenal comprising of everything from water pistols to rocket launchers. It's the settings, myriad slices of suburbia pulled straight out of every low-budget horror movie ever made. And it's the characters – even the titular neighbours come in all shapes and forms, with each of them worth a different amount of points if you can save them in time. Thankfully, you don't need to rescue them all but, the more you manage to free, the better your score will be. And just like most games in this genre, that's all that really matters.



Donkey Kong Country 2: Diddy's Kong Quest

DEVELOPER: RARE
YEAR: 1995 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

21 **If you could** all have just pulled together and decided amongst yourselves which *Donkey Kong Country* game was best, it could quite easily have made the top five. Instead, divided opinion gives us two *Kong* games in this list, Rare's platform sequel just missing out on the top 20. Quite how DK came to be kidnapped in the first place is a conversation for another time, though it's clear that Diddy and Dixie can handle themselves well enough without him. It was around this point that Rare's love affair with collectibles began, so those that have enjoyed cleaning up and finding everything in the likes of *Banjo-Kazooie* and *Star Fox Adventures* would do well to recognise where it all started.

Super Aleste

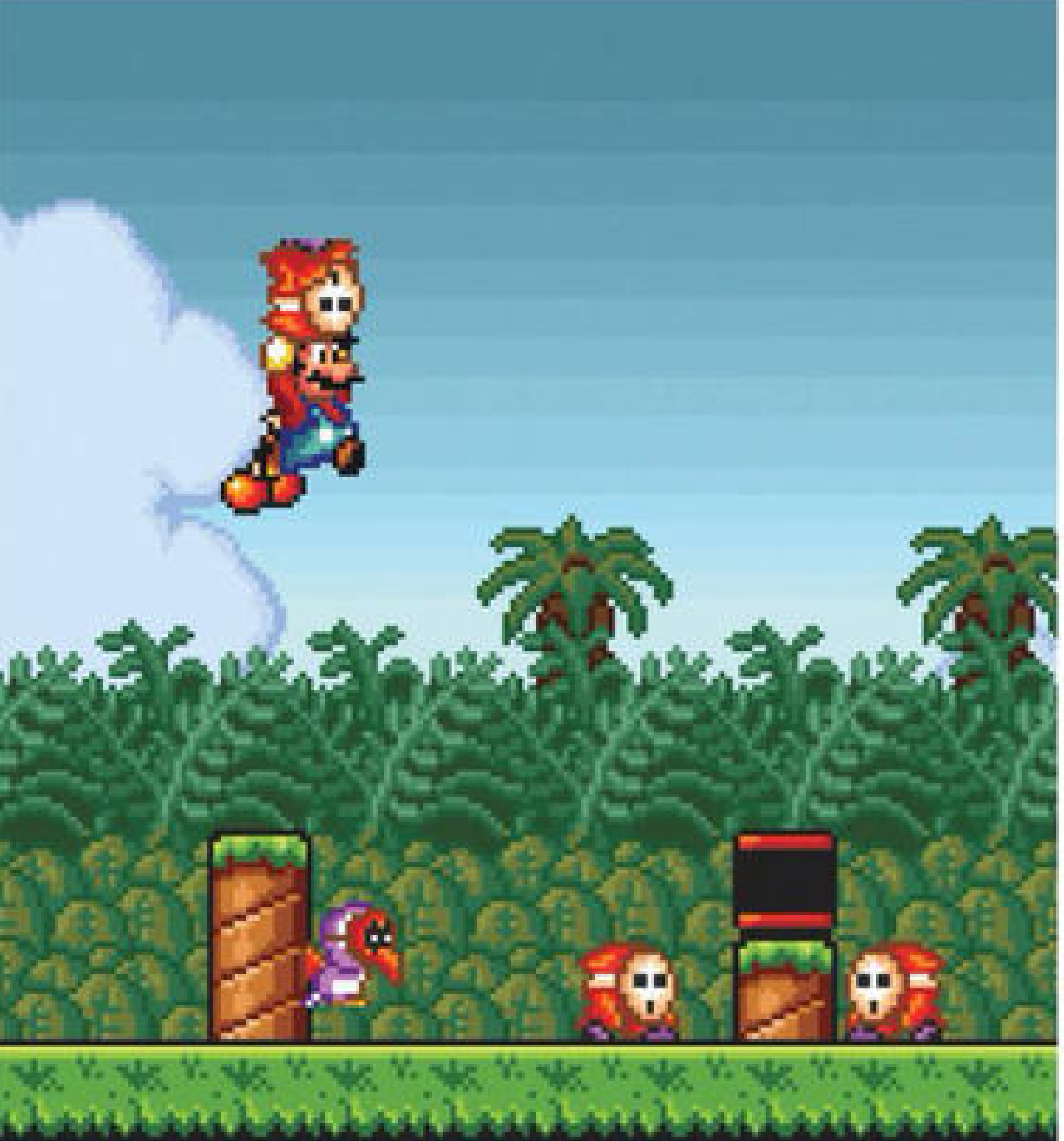
DEVELOPER: COMPILE
YEAR: 1992 **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

20 **An excellent shooter,** as evidenced by the fact that it managed to beat the likes of *Super R-Type, Gradius III* and *UN Squadron*. A rich and varied arsenal is what really makes *Super Aleste* stand out, each of the eight weapons offering six different levels of power. Furthermore, each can be modified at the touch of a button, adding reverse fire (or similar area coverage) or changing properties to give options that can more or less cover every situation the game throws at you. Like pretty much every shooter, there's a problem in that death causes you to respawn with virtually no firepower – but there's a simple solution to that problem: just be better at the game. Solved.

EarthBound

DEVELOPER: APE/HAL LABORATORY
YEAR: 1994 **GENRE:** RPG

19 **It may not** have had a UK release, but that seems to have had little impact on the popularity of this glorious RPG. Perhaps offered a little more exposure thanks to Ness's appearance in *Super Smash Bros*, this quirky little title can take pride of place in any collection – mint originals now change hands for upwards of 500 quid. Why? It's one of the few retro classics not to have seen a re-release in any form, despite constant calls for it to come to Virtual Console. Still, all that is set to change now, as the cult RPG has finally been released on Nintendo's digital service. Let's see if that does anything to the insane price that original copies currently go for…



Super Mario All-Stars

DEVELOPER: NINTENDO EAD

YEAR RELEASED: 1993 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

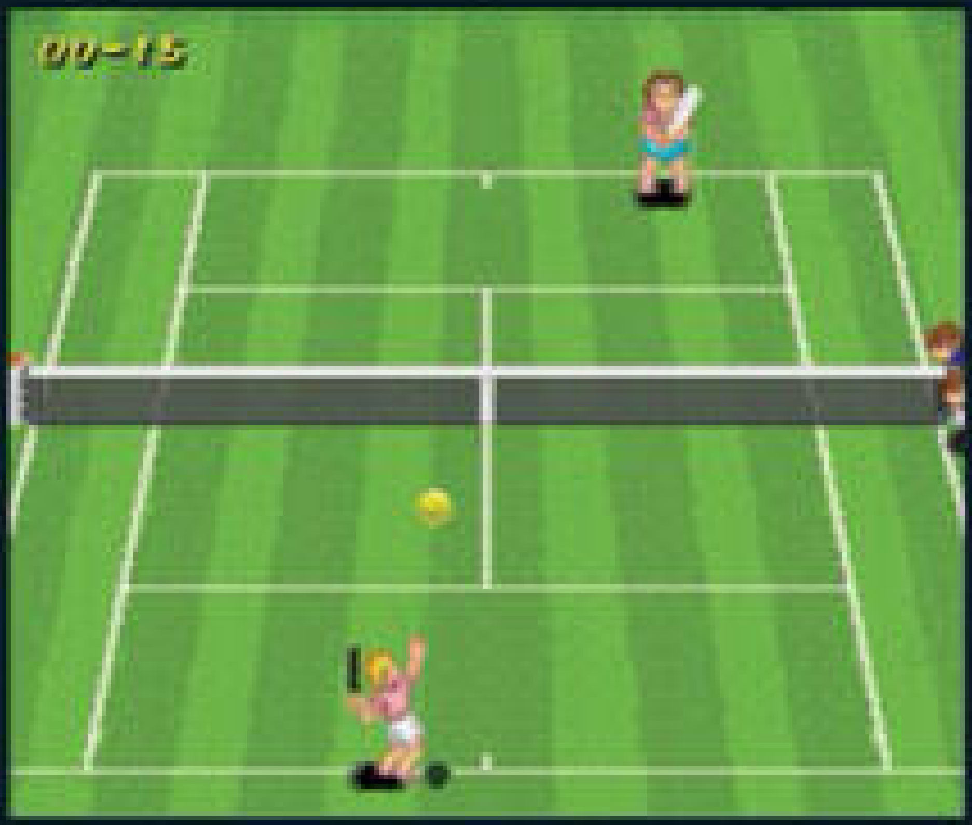
18 **A compilation and** console bundle title it may be, but far be it from that to exclude this collection of timeless games from your list. Sporting enhanced versions of the three NES *Mario* titles as well as super-tough variant *The Lost Levels* – famously *Super Mario Bros 2* in Japan, while we received a massively modified version of *Doki Doki Panic* – this is pretty much platforming heaven. Any one of the collected games would be worthy of a spot on this list alone, so the combination of all four is pretty much a shoo-in. You could buy a console and get by for months just on the single bundled game, which is not something that can be said of any console since. Later versions also included *Super Mario World*, which you can safely expect to read more about in the coming pages. Just a guess.

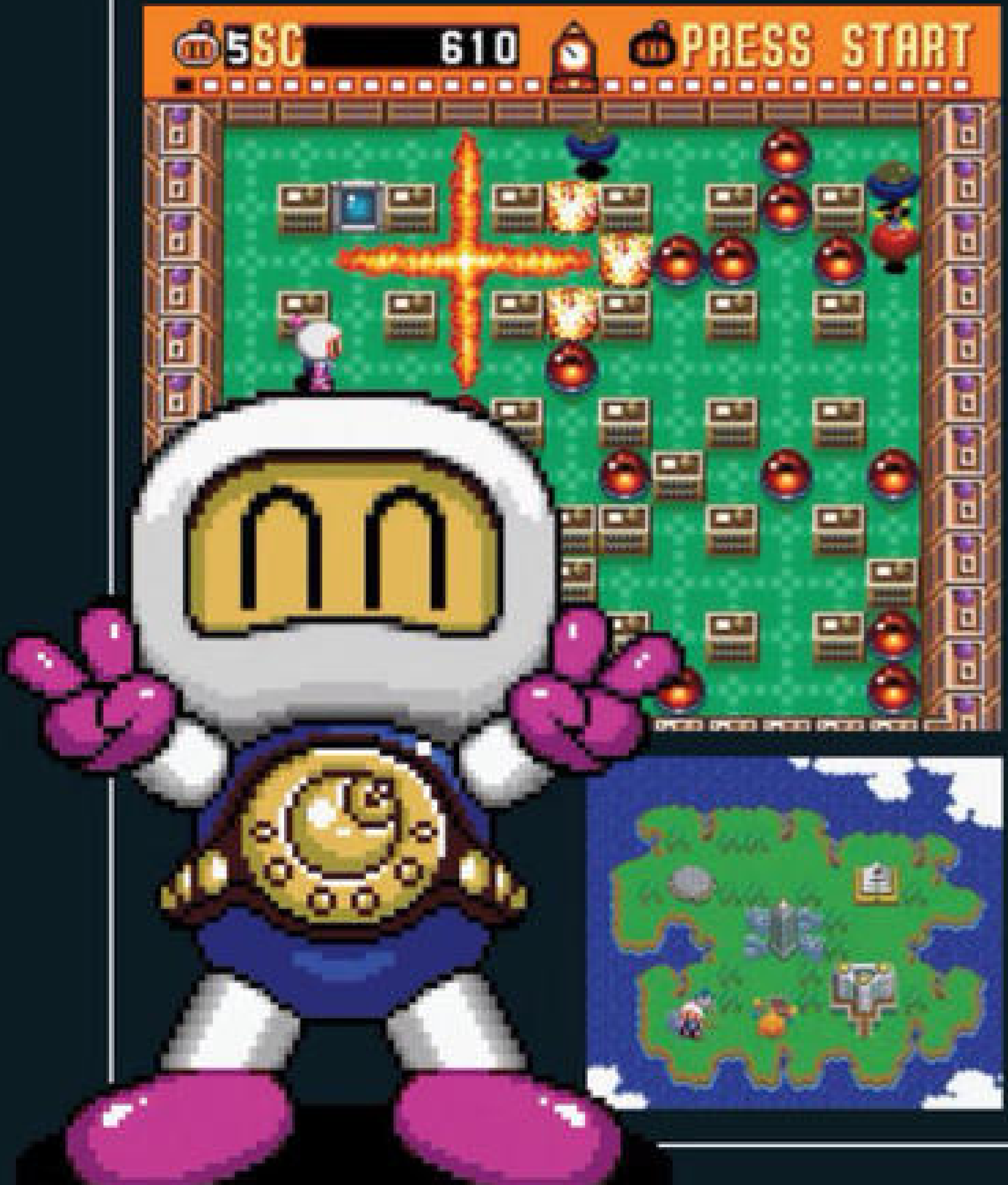
Super Tennis

DEVELOPER: TOKYO SHOSEKI

YEAR RELEASED: 1991 **GENRE:** SPORTS

17 **Early titles are** always going to live large in the hearts of fans – they're the ones that get the most play while you're waiting for the next big game, after all. We can all but assume that's why this 1991 title earned a spot on this list, although we'd struggle to point to an earlier multiplayer sports game that we got so much enjoyment out of. Making tennis quick and fun was a masterstroke, though even the points that dragged on proved to be hugely enjoyable – that's why we saw the same arcade template applied to *Smash Court Tennis* and, later, *Virtua Tennis*. We're all for simulation but, when it comes to a quick sporting thrill, we'd struggle to name many better games than this beauty. It sure as hell beats leaping around the lounge with a remote in your hand, that's for sure.





Super Bomberman

DEVELOPER: HUDSON SOFT

YEAR RELEASED: 1993 **GENRE:** ACTION

16 **Again, *Bomberman* would** be higher on this list if it weren't for the fact that gamers had no less than five different kinds of *Super* to consider in this case. Ignoring the fact that the console had just two controller ports, Konami elected to use an adorable multi-tap to allow for showdowns on a scale never before seen on console. Later games introduced more elements tailored to accommodate multiplayer massacres and, to be frank, we'd probably rather have seen one of these make the list than the simple original. However, there's a lot to be said for getting there first, and for all of you who voted for any of the superb sequels you can at least find solace in the fact that the little bobble-headed murderer managed to get onto the list at all. And we're glad he did – there are few better tests of pure gaming skill than a *Bomberman* face-off. Quite how this franchise wound up entertaining kart racers and sports games we'll never know – it remains one of the best and purest multiplayer experiences in the entirety of gaming.

Donkey Kong Country

DEVELOPER: RARE

YEAR: 1994 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

15 **Poor old Retro.** As much as it tried its best to recapture the magic of the originals, in essence it's just not the same – the music, the design and the well judged level of difficulty were all nailed the first time around. A stunning effort by Rare.

Chrono Trigger

DEVELOPER: SQUARE

YEAR: 1995 **GENRE:** RPG

14 **As if this** time-hopping RPG classic wasn't going to make this list. *As if.* Any game that stars a noble frog warrior is one that we fully support, so we'll take any excuse we can get to celebrate this wonderful action-RPG from Square's archives.

Star Fox

DEVELOPER: NINTENDO EAD/ARGONAUT SOFTWARE **YEAR:** 1993

GENRE: SHOOT-'EM-UP

13 **This is more** than deserving of recognition for its introduction of useless gaming baggage Slippy Toad alone. It's just a shame that its pioneering 3D visuals will forever take a back seat due to the 'do a barrel roll' meme it spawned.

Final Fantasy VI

DEVELOPER: SQUARE

YEAR: 1994 **GENRE:** RPG

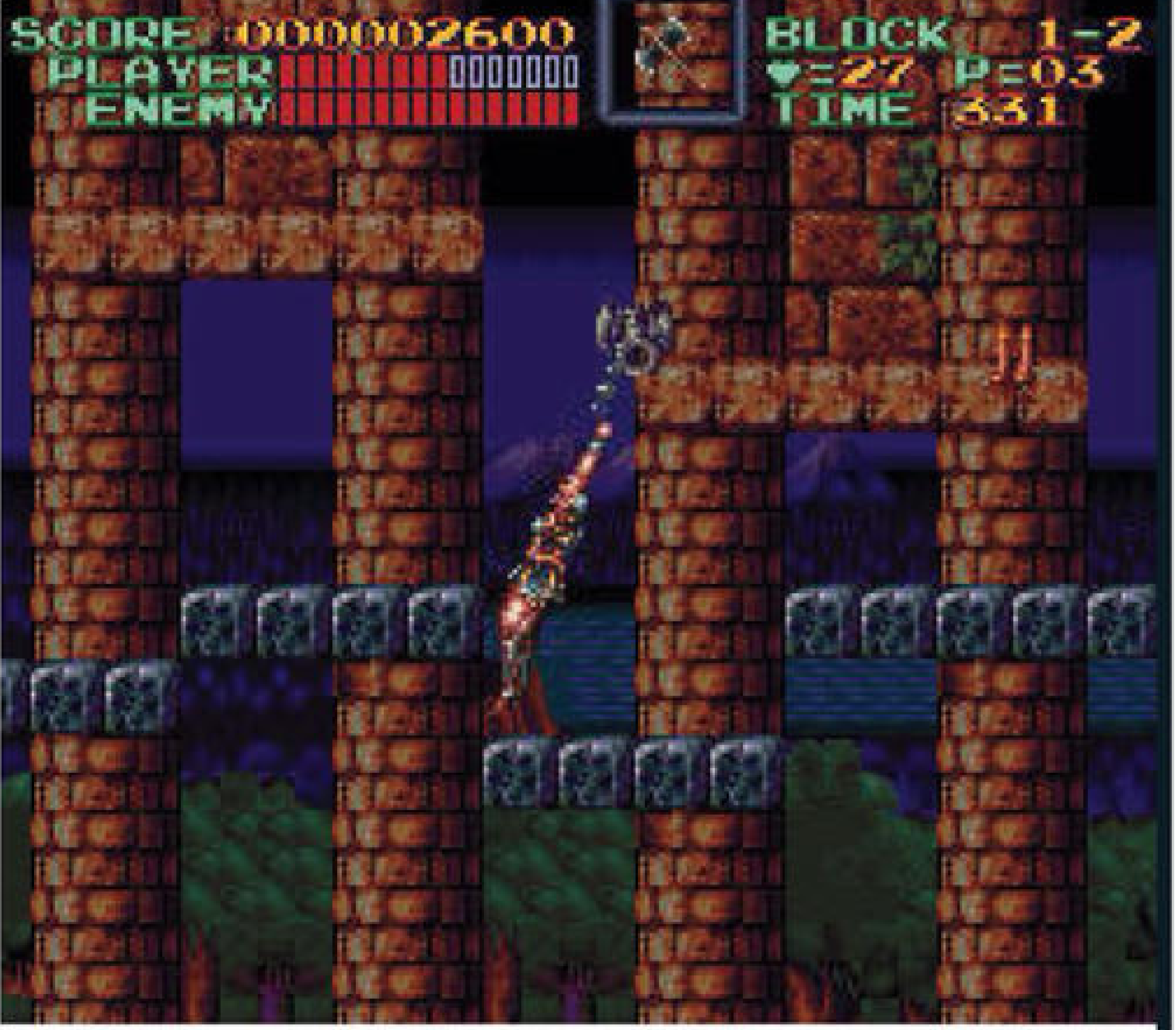
12 **Picking just one** of Square's 16-bit *Final Fantasy* games is a near-impossible choice, so well done for settling on this one. Echoes of *FFVI* can be felt in every canon game since, and its Uematsu soundtrack is enough to secure it a place on this rundown alone.

F-Zero

DEVELOPER: NINTENDO EAD

YEAR: 1990 **GENRE:** RACING

11 **Racing games are** boring? Yeah, nice try. A futuristic setting and amazing 3D visuals made this an unforgettable experience for everyone who played it, though it's saddening that we haven't seen a new version since the exceptional *GX* on GameCube.

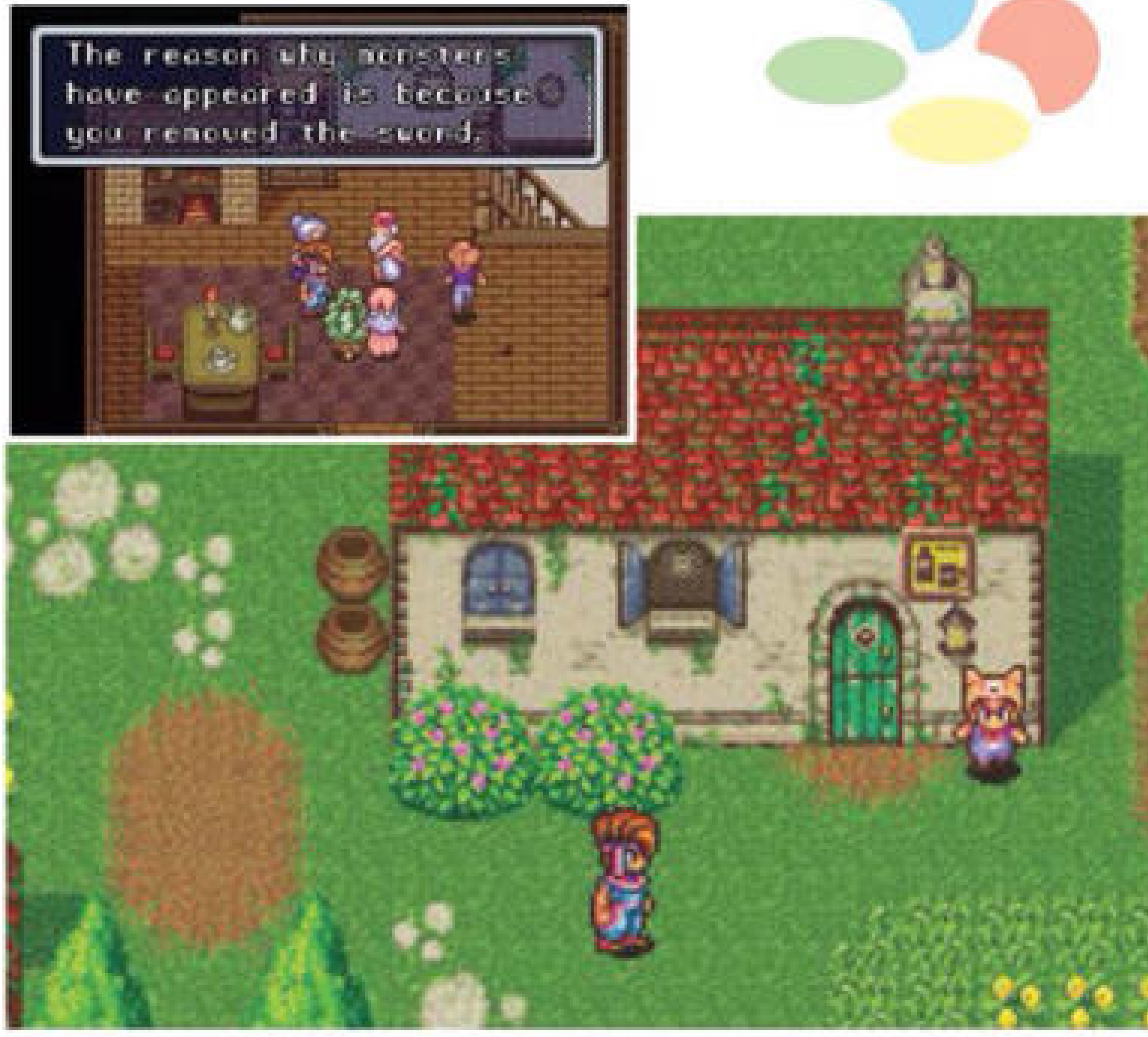


Super Castlevania IV

DEVELOPER: KONAMI

YEAR RELEASED: 1991 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

10 Ask most people which is their favourite *Castlevania* and, more often than not, you'll hear *Symphony Of The Night*. While the PlayStation game is a spectacular display of genre-straddling RPG action, there's a hardcore arcade purity to *Super Castlevania IV* that gives it the edge. The music, the bosses, the sheer variety… this is the stuff of legend and its reverence is far from ill-deserved. Action-platforming with a gothic slant, you could walk for miles and not find anyone who has gotten past the second level – *Dark Souls* and its ilk may claim to have created the hardcore sector, but we know better. *Castlevania* was there first. And if you can claim to have finished this, that's something that counts for a lot on your gaming CV – arcade coin-munchers have nothing on this beast.



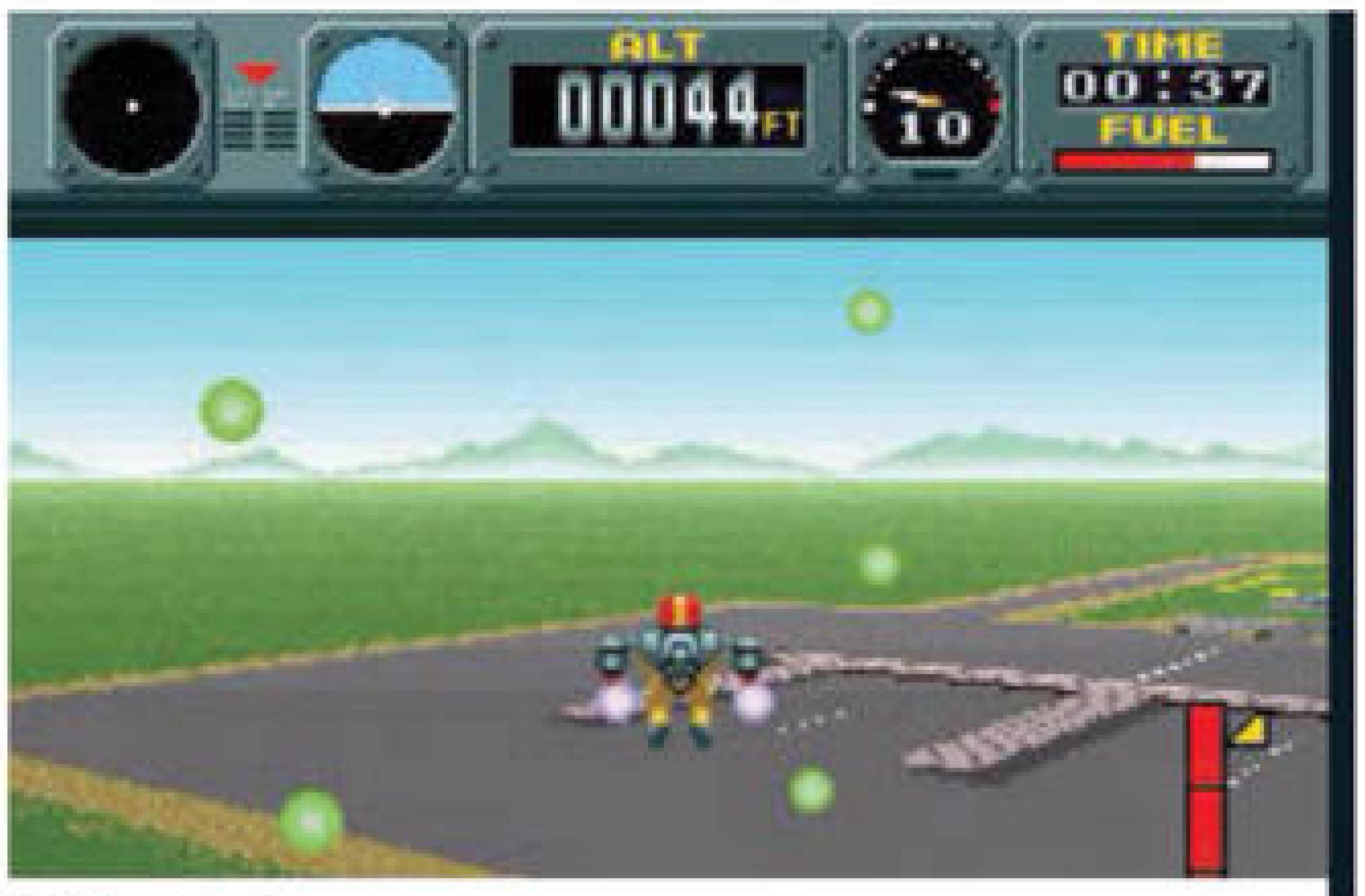
The reason why monsters have appeared is because you removed the sword.

Secret Of Mana

DEVELOPER: SQUARE

YEAR RELEASED: 1993 **GENRE:** ACTION-RPG

9 There had to be at least one Square RPG in the top ten and, with so many failing to get European releases, it stands to reason that this should be the one to make the cut. Three-player co-op was a unique selling point but, even without that, *Secret Of Mana* would still hold up brilliantly. This action-RPG managed to tick every box, from a unique leveling system to a great cast of characters that could be tailored to your own whim. Despite several sequels, this remains the best game in the series – the PlayStation sequel has its fans, but their numbers are feeble compared to those who would back the original. To this day, we've yet to see a truly great *Mana* follow-up and, while it's unlikely that we'll see one in this play-safe environment, it'd be a retro insta-win if Square announced a new *Mana* game tomorrow.



Pilotwings

DEVELOPER: NINTENDO EAD

YEAR RELEASED: 1990 **GENRE:** FLIGHT SIMULATION

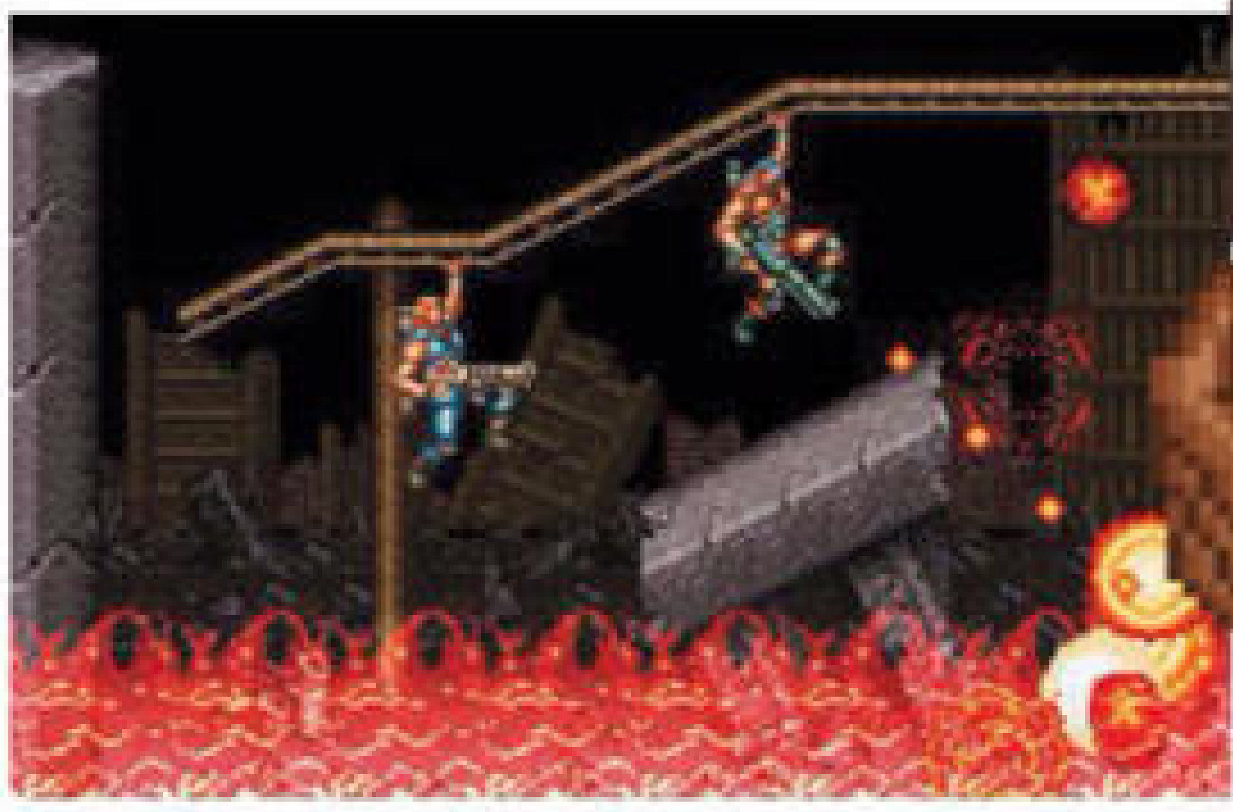
8 Tech demos seem to be the order of the day lately, with the likes of Wii Sports and Kinect Adventures capturing the imaginations of millions. But this beat all of them to the punch, a showcase for the unknown power of the SNES and an early glimpse at the magic of 3D. Few could have imagined that a flight game would be the one to show off what the SNES was truly capable of, but that's precisely what *Pilotwings* did. Three-dimensional gaming wouldn't become the norm until years later, but we can't forget who planted that seed – few did it better either, to be fair. In terms of offering a unique experience, few titles can rub shoulders with *Pilotwings*. Even the N64 and 3DS updates never really managed to recapture the magic of the original, fun as they may be.

Contra III: The Alien Wars

DEVELOPER: KONAMI

YEAR RELEASED: 1992 **GENRE:** RUN-AND-GUN

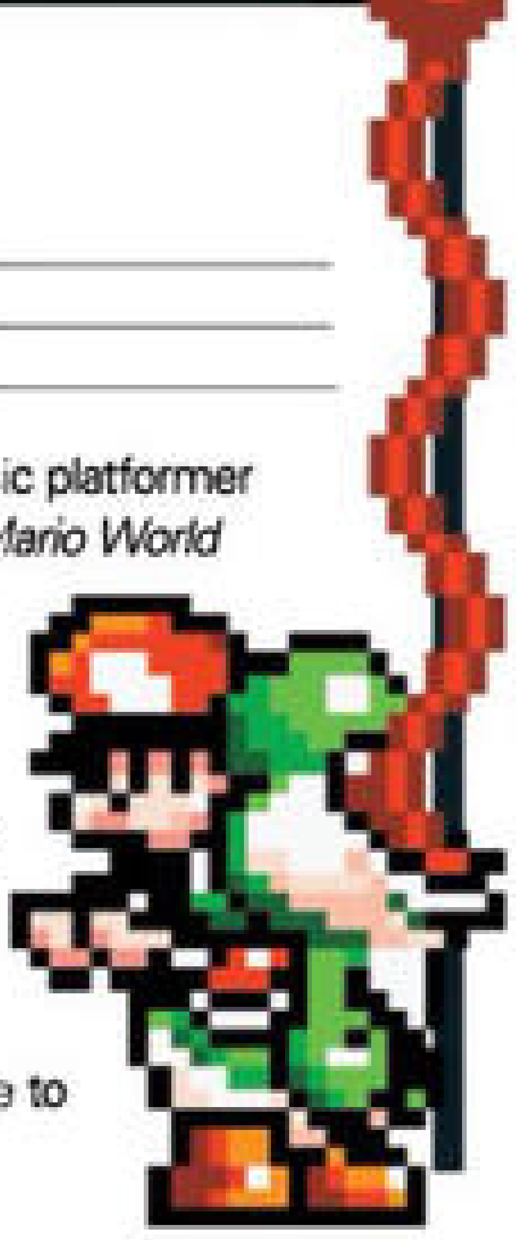
7 Anyone that throws their hardcore weight around based on recent accomplishments like finishing *Dark Souls* or *Super Meat Boy* would do well to pop back in time and give this monster a go. Whatever you choose to call it, this is pretty much the epitome of hardcore – dudes be coming from everywhere, and all of them will kill you in a single hit. *Contra* had lost its way recently until *Hard Corps* brought it back – it's rare that a sequel nails exactly what was so good about the original but that's what Arc managed to do. The original still presents an awesome challenge and one that anyone can be proud to have conquered. Pretty much the ultimate run-and-gun game, *Contra III* exists to kick the ass of anyone who tries to play it. As you probably know. If not, give it a shot today and don't even vaguely expect to win.



Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island

DEVELOPER: NINTENDO EAD
YEAR RELEASED: 1995 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

6 **We have to** be honest – we thought this classic platformer would come in a little higher. But with *Super Mario World* stealing the majority of the vote, we guess it was a 'one or the other' mindset in most cases. Either way, this dino-themed sequel performed admirably and, while we wouldn't want to have to make a pitch as to which was the better game, the egg-tossing love this game has received pretty much does that for us. Platform games don't come much better than this, especially when they don't involve the bugs or bandicoots that have come to define the genre.



Super Metroid

DEVELOPER: NINTENDO R&D1/INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS
YEAR RELEASED: 1994 **GENRE:** ACTION/ADVENTURE

ENERGY 99
010

5 **Few games have** laid out their stalls quite so well as this. *Super Metroid* basically doesn't say a word, but it doesn't need to. If anything, that's the joy of it – the mystery is what keeps you playing and, even when you know what you're doing, this is not an easy world to explore. Setting the template for an entire sub-genre, this can happily claim to be one of the most influential games ever made. The recent Virtual Console Wii U re-release has given us such greats as 'Y can't Metroid crawl', cementing it as one of the great work-it-out-as-you-go-along games out there…

Super Mario Kart

DEVELOPER: NINTENDO EAD
YEAR RELEASED: 1992 **GENRE:** RACER

4 **Another obvious choice,** although it'd take a real Blue Shell enthusiast (there's no such thing) to claim that *Mario Kart* was a fair way to settle disputes. Still, few would argue that this wasn't one of the great multiplayer games of our time, especially in the age before the game-breaking Blue Shell came into play. Multiplayer rivalries can still be settled with this tried and tested method, although many cite more recent games – *Double Dash, MK7* and even the Wii version – as the best. There's no right answer... well, okay, there is. And it's not *Mario Kart 64*.

Street Fighter II Turbo

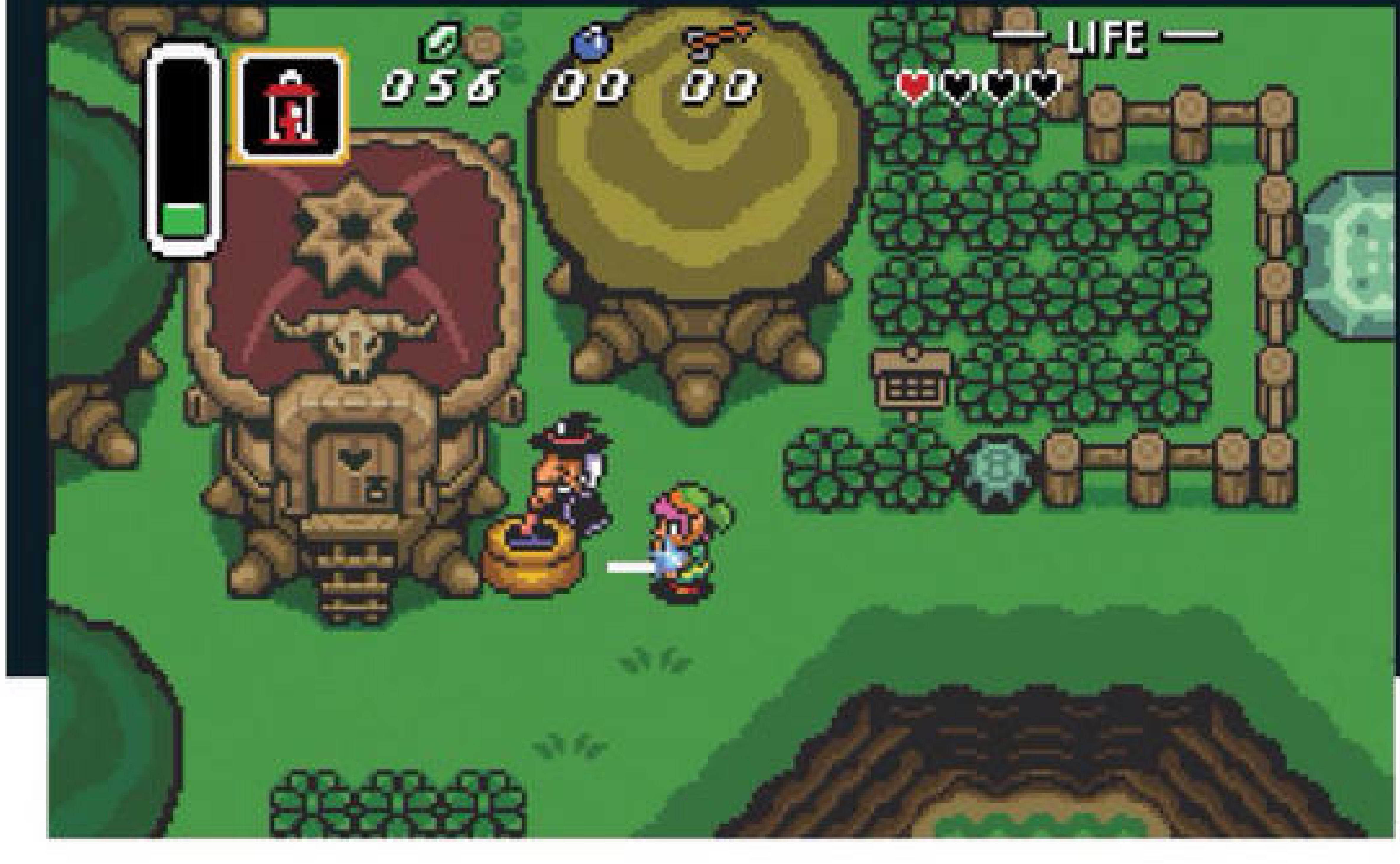
DEVELOPER: CAPCOM
YEAR RELEASED: 1992 **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP

3 **If you owned** a SNES and had a second controller, chances are you doubled up for the opportunity to show your mates what a Dragon Punch or a Flash Kick was. *Street Fighter* was *the* go-to competitive game at the time and, while we've since learned to play on stick, that wasn't really an option back then. Capcom did an incredible job of bringing the arcade experience home – there are few better coin-op conversions than this one and it was this kind of perfect port that made your friends with a Mega Drive incredibly jealous.

The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past

DEVELOPER: NINTENDO EAD
YEAR RELEASED: 1991 **GENRE:** ACTION-RPG

2 **Arguments will rage** until the end of time as to which of Link's adventures is the best (ironically, it's *definitely* not *Link's Adventure*) but it's this seminal title and *Ocarina Of Time* that most often find themselves tussling for the top spot. While the 3D debut was unquestionably a masterpiece, it likely wouldn't have existed at all had it not been for this beautiful and surprisingly open RPG – it might have offered slightly more direction than the NES original but it still managed to feel like you were lost in a strange world with only your wits (well, those and whatever tools you could loot from dungeons) to rely on. The reveal of the Dark World ranks up there with the best gaming surprises of all time. Eat your heart out, Kojima…



Super Mario World

DEVELOPER: NINTENDO EAD **YEAR RELEASED:** 1990 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

1 **Nintendo's mascot was** always going to be a clear favourite to claim the top spot on this list, but the landslide took even those of us expecting a moustachioed number one by surprise. Mario didn't just walk this list – he grabbed a Cape Feather and flew over the top of the whole damn thing.

With *Super Mario World* appearing as a pack-in with many console bundles, this would have been the first experience of 16-bit gaming for many people. And what a way to start – it'd be like your first taste of meat being a huge T-bone steak, or your first car after passing your test being a Ferrari. This is seen by many as being as close as we've come to platforming perfection and, truth be told, we're in no position to argue. We still play *Super Mario World* regularly to this day and we're *still* discovering new tricks and secrets hidden away in the many, many stages.

There's so much to talk about in celebration of *Super Mario World* that it's difficult to know where to begin. But, we'll start as is logical – with pretty much the first thing you see when starting up the game. The map structure isn't entirely new, with *Super Mario Bros 3* pulling much the same stunt albeit broken down by level. But, it's the improved sense of scale that comes from having one big map that really makes this feel like an epic journey, and one where the route – and even the destination – aren't always clear. Find a hidden exit to a stage and you can find yourself branching out into areas far more difficult than you're used to. But, with so many routes on offer, there's no shame in returning to the beaten path in order to hurry along your journey to Bowser's castle.

Then, there's the way that each of the power-ups changes how you approach and traverse each stage. A cape will let you soar up to hidden cloud platforms if you can get the speed up to get lift in the first place, while a fire flower lets you muscle your way past many obstacles. There are even a few situational pickups (such as the one that turns Mario into a balloon) to use and abuse, though it's definitely the trusty mushroom that will see the most use. You can even keep one of these back in reserve – useful if you know you'll need it later in a tricky level and don't want to risk losing it along the way.

Whether or not there's such a thing as a perfect game is an argument that will never be won. Whether or not *Super Mario World* is the closest thing we've seen to one, though? That's not even up for debate.

What Makes It So Super

Hidden Exits

If you've got the right power-up and an explorer's spirit, there are loads of secret ways to end levels prematurely. Doing so can open up new paths that let you speed across the world map, as Star Road fans will know

Dino Might

Yoshi eggs are hidden away in many of the blocks scattered around *Mario World*, and unleashing the beast is always a joy. Not only does he offer you an extra hit, there are also certain areas that you simply can't reach without him

Perfect Design

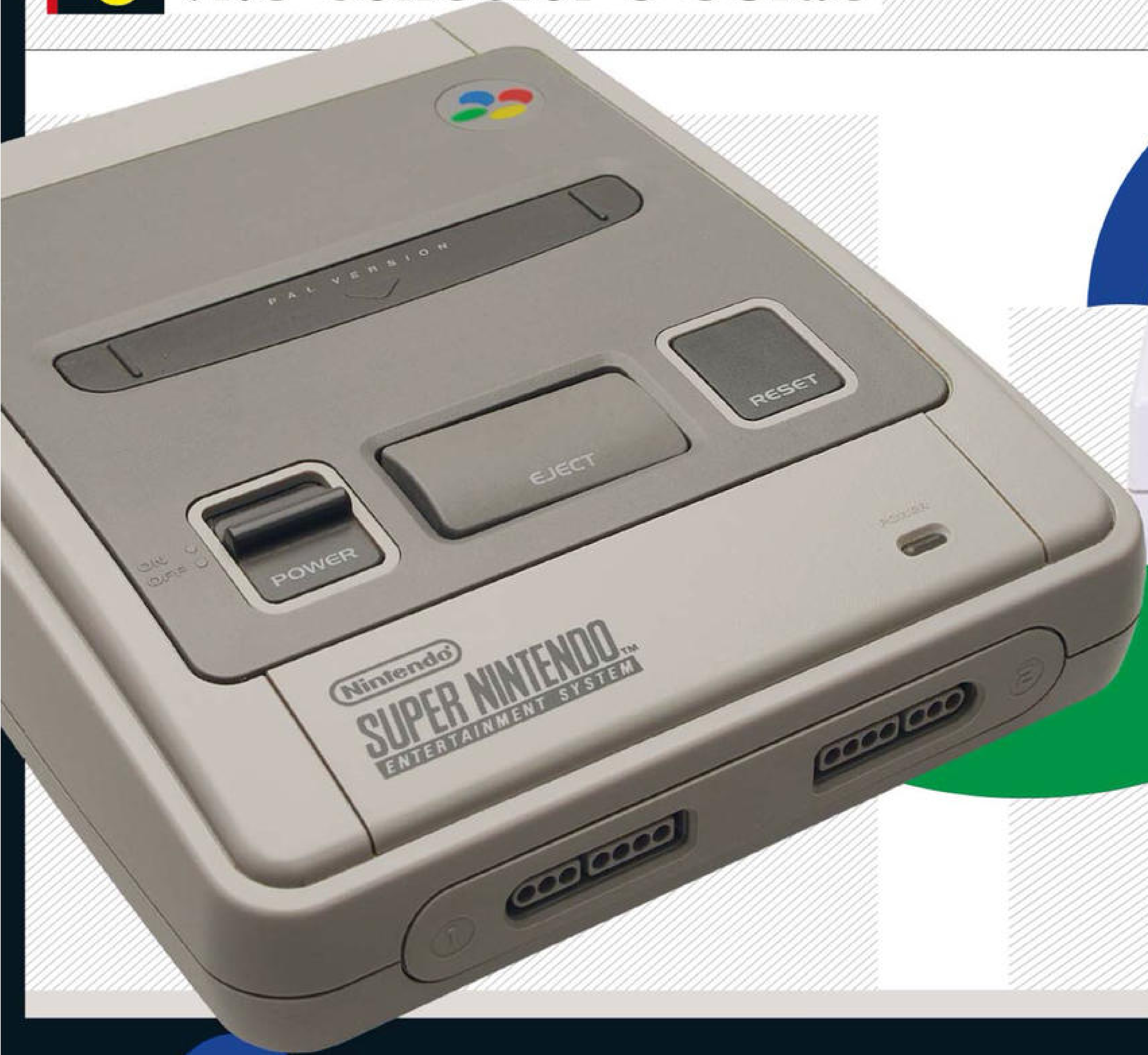
Variety counts for a lot, though it's the fact that there's no weak link that proves the most amazing. Whether swimming, soaring, riding or climbing, *Super Mario World* never so much as misses a beat

Star Power

Soaring above the world is Star Road, a set of super-tough stages with secret exits on every one. If you know where to find the lot, you can finish the entire game in less than ten minutes

Endless Replayability

So many exits, so many routes, so many tiny little secrets to find… there's just so much to this game that, as we said, we're still finding new power-ups and hidden areas to this day. As close to the perfect platformer as you can get, basically


PAL VERSION
RESET
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Nintendo
SUPER NINTENDO ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM
1
2

SUPER

The SNES is a great console to collect for. Follow this guide and you won't go far wrong

SUPER NINTENDO
POWER
RESET

SUPER NINTENDO
1
2

» **Manufacturer:** Nintendo » **Models:** Super Nintendo/Super Famicom » **Launched:** 1990 » **Country of Origin:** Japan

NINTENDO

The Collector's Guide

×5
×0
Sandros
SUPER NES CONTROLLER
Contains one Super NES Controller for super precision game control!
Nintendo
SUPER NINTENDO ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM
PAL VERSION
TOTAL!
100% FOR PLAYERS OF NINTENDO
FREE! Massive poster!
Okay, so now you've got your NINTENDO
You need to know HOW to finish your games and WHAT to buy next. Inside: 15 pages of tips and 350 game reviews!
CHRONO TRIGGER
ASTRO GO! GO!
SUPER Famicom

▪ It wasn't just the games that came in flimsy cardboard boxes, making anything in-tact more valuable.

WHY IT'S COLLECTABLE

Growing up in the Nineties wasn't easy. From an early age, many gamers found themselves thrown into the epicentre of a digital war between two Japanese forces to be reckoned with.

Sega and Nintendo's conflict controlled the playgrounds and workplace, *Sonic* against *Mario*. The battle continues today, as the mention of the Super Nintendo versus the Sega Mega Drive has collectors raising their control pads with pride.

Despite hosting fewer games than Sega's 16-bit offering, the SNES hosts a wealth of blockbuster hits amongst its huge library of over 500 known European releases. With the likes of *Super Mario World*, *F-Zero* and *Pilotwings* available from day one, shortly followed by *Super Mario Kart*, *Mega Man X* and *The Legend of Zelda: A Link To The Past*, it is no wonder that it has continued to captivate gamers to present day. However, it wasn't just about the high quality software available. Given that the gaming world had just experienced a very hard-edged and ugly selection of consoles (such as the NES and Master System), the arrival of an alluring curved console bundled with a comfortable control pad was too good to dismiss.

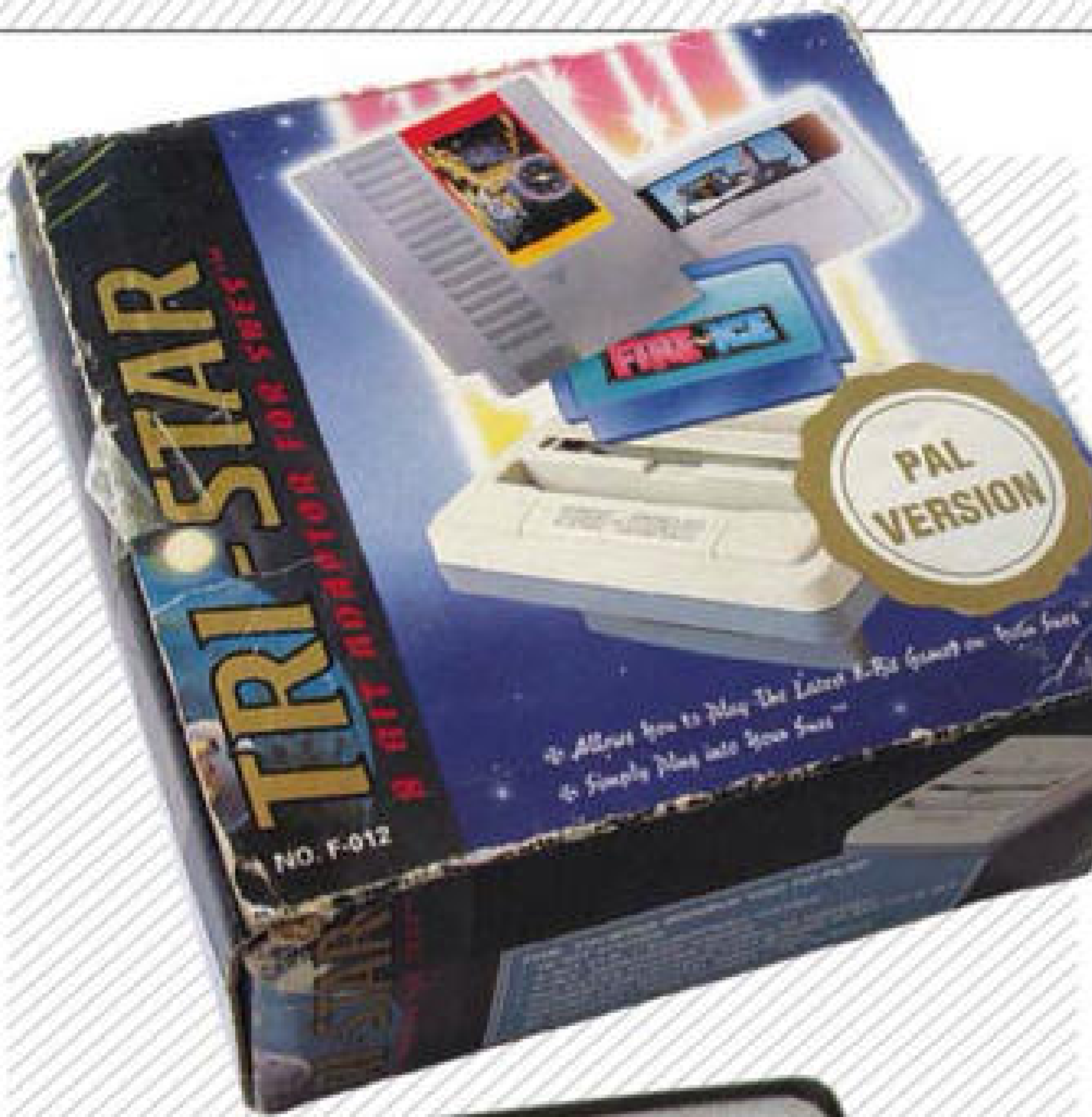
Where collecting is concerned, a large majority of the SNES catalogue has seen a considerable rise in value over the last few years from an influx of nostalgia-hungry gamers. But, surely these financial skirmishes taking place on auction sites are just as prominent for the Super Nintendo's 16-bit rival? Luckily, the Sega Mega Drive fans are much safer from this barrage of collectors due to one conclusive reason. Up until the Nintendo Gamecube, every game branded with the Official Nintendo Seal was released within a flimsy cardboard box. With so few mint condition boxed games available (in comparison to the near indestructible hard-cased Mega Drive games), they are highly sought after, as collectors challenge each other to replicate that brand new feeling again.

As time passed by and Mario's newest home began to build up an incredible momentum within Europe, a sporadic release schedule shortly followed and reared its ugly head. A large chunk of the rarest PAL releases originated from a single country, leaving frustrated gamers and collectors today trawling countless top-level domain variations of eBay. Of these rarities, *X Zone* (Scandinavia), *Whirlo* (Spain), *Cool World* (Spain), *Sonic Blast Man* (Spain) *Space Invaders* (Australia) and *Super Chase HQ* (Australia) tend to be the most sought after by 16-bit collectors around the world.

Although Nintendo had a wide range of multinational gamers, their hard work and dedication continued to ensure each Super Nintendo owner within Europe was catered for. Many releases were adjusted to better suit their target audiences – changes which often included alternate artwork, varying language options and occasionally 'classic' re-releases. Although this level of consideration sounds fantastic, those aiming to collect SNES variants face countless headaches due to the sheer volume of releases out there. *Super Mario World* is an extreme example of this, given its seventeen variants.

SUPER NINTENDO
SELECT
START

The U.S. Super Nintendo pad dispensed with the bright colours of its PAL and Japanese counterparts.



DID YOU KNOW?

No matter how fondly you remember the aesthetic curves of the Super Nintendo console, a more minuscule and desirable iteration left the production line at Nintendo HQ. Dubbed the SNES Mini or SNES Jr, the redesigned console was released in both America and Japan for the low cost of $99.99 bundled with a pack-in game. While the baby-sized console never made its way to Europe, it remains a frequent purchase by those who missed out, but with a pinch of hesitation. In the most unusual case imaginable, the SNES Jr has been a victim of near perfect fakes arising on eBay over the years.

There is quite a difference between Western and Japanese box art. Which you prefer is a matter of taste.

STREET FIGHTER II TURBO
CAPCOM
Nintendo

Special edition cases were rare. If only they all came in metal tins, there would be a lot more complete packages today.

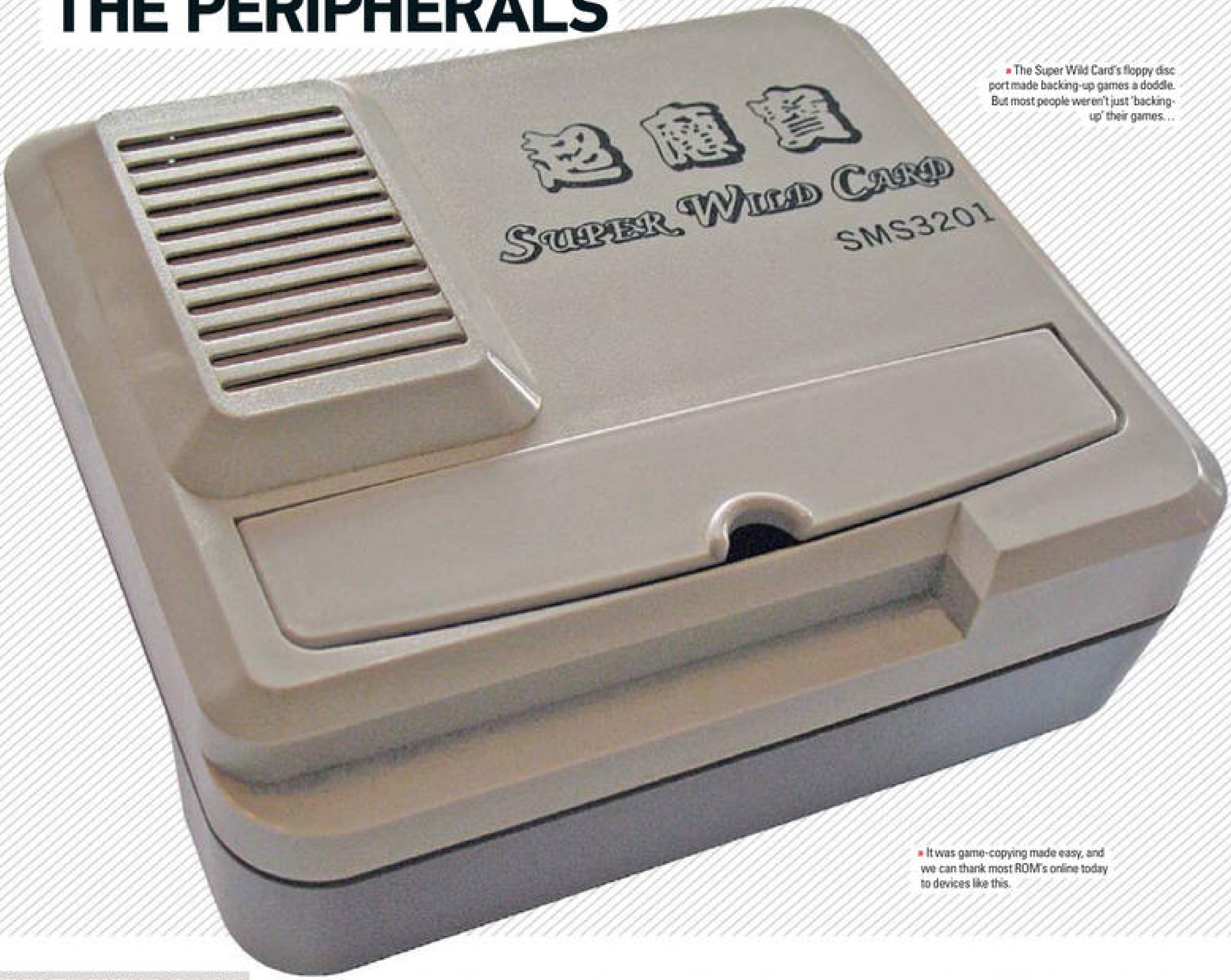
Complications aside, the Japanese and American release lists offered a much larger library of games, yet there was still a selection of prominent European releases which have gamers from across the pond intrigued. The most notable is the timeless Japanese RPG *Terranigma*, which for some untold reason saw a European localisation, yet nothing for gamers stateside. Auction snipers worldwide sit in wait for each and every time it surfaces, sadly driving the price up. *Whirlo*, *The Firemen* and *Super Bomberman 3* are other good examples of this, as European gamers often struggle to hold onto their hidden treasures.

One of the more interesting aspects to note during the 16-bit era, was how easy import games were to acquire. While the price tags within magazine adverts suggested that early arrivals of Japanese and American software were probably worth being patient for, there was one publication which almost justified these financial kidnappings. Simply known as *Super Play*, it is often referred to as the greatest gaming magazine of all time, due to its perfect combination of covering games and Japanese culture. As it focused mainly on imported titles months before their European release, a new wave of gamers were born unhappy with what their home country could offer. These disgruntled fans were often found excusing themselves as they happily paid premium prices to get their latest gaming hit way ahead of schedule. Whilst these purchases could often be expensive gambles, many of these investments have paid off, as gamers obtained classics such as *Earthbound*, *Final Fantasy III (VI)* and *Chrono Trigger* which never arrived in Europe. However, what they were unable to see at the time is how many of these exclusive imports would eventually fetch three figure sums, as they do today.

With such an enticement from abroad, often limited by how far our distressed wallets could be stretched, Super Nintendo fans were left questioning how they could enjoy the wealth of cartridges without skipping meals. Quite naturally, the black market was well aware of this fact and began to envision various ways to profiteer from the 16-bit juggernaut. While very few bootlegs found their way underneath the counter of less honest shops, the pirates had another device at the ready to potentially make the expensive cartridge medium a thing of the past. Given that a large majority of early cartridges could fit onto a single floppy disk, a disk drive was placed inside a Super Nintendo compatible device known as the Super Wild Card. Capable of backing up and loading cartridges from disk, this revolutionary and attractive piece of kit made stealing games all too easy. While there are more modern alternatives to this hardware, the Super Wild Card range and various other similar devices still get snapped up rather quickly due to their elusive nature.

Offering countless games spanning multiple regions and an array of diverse accessories, the Super Nintendo is by far one of the most desirable consoles to collect. Although the deep end of collecting is quickly requiring a well padded wallet to bask in, both gamers and collectors can take pleasure in the knowledge that the majority of the Super Nintendo's classic titles can still be had at a reasonable price.

THE PERIPHERALS



▪ The Super Wild Card's floppy disc port made backing-up games a doddle. But most people weren't just 'backing-up' their games…

▪ It was game-copying made easy, and we can thank most ROM's online today to devices like this.

SUPER WILD CARD

With cartridges breaking the upper limits of £59.99 in the Nineties, SNES owners often found themselves limited to how many games they can afford. While this did make game rental services a profitable business, the more savvy gamers amongst us looked for other solutions.

Piracy and cartridge copiers were no stranger to the games industry. Nintendo had already embraced the illegitimate series of 'Game Doctors' for the Famicom, which ironically used the Famicom Disk System's proprietary medium of unique disks to create counterfeit software. The SNES equivalent, however, used a more accessible method, which effectively made those expensive cartridges a non-issue.

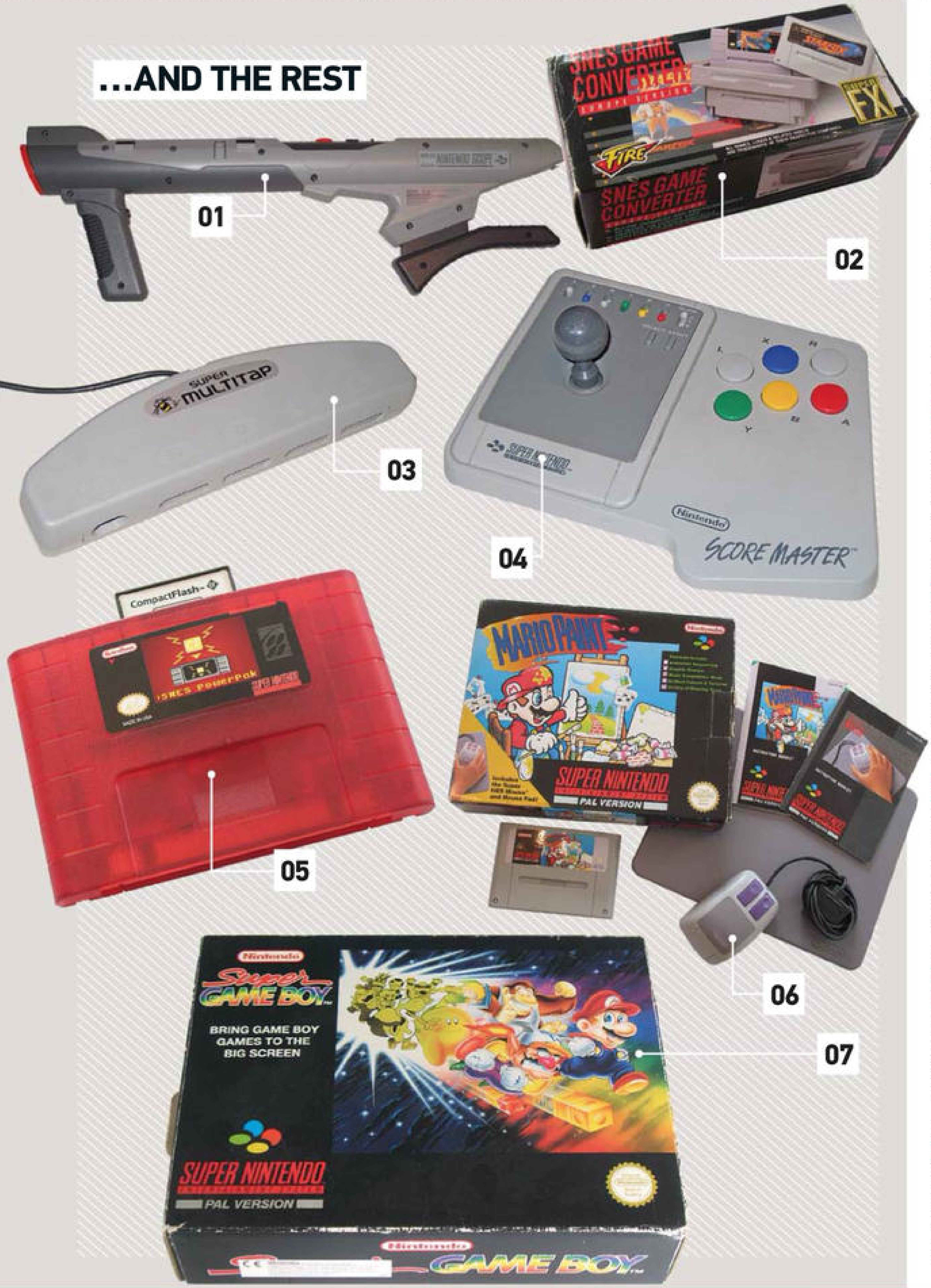
The Super Wild Card released by Front Far East was amongst the many different flavours of backup devices which began to surface. Within each unit lay a floppy disk drive capable of reading and writing to a range of 3½-inch disk formats. Once powered up, a simplistic menu appeared on screen with the option to either back-up or load a game from the disk currently inserted. Titles exceeding the capacity of a single disk, such as the massive 48 Mbit *Tales Of Phantasia*, were broken down into multiple files often spanning a range of disks. Once the entire contents of these backups had been loaded into memory, the chosen backup would load instantly, replicating the true cartridge experience flawlessly.

Unfortunately for Nintendo, the entire process of backing up a Super Nintendo cartridge onto a disk was all too easy. Given that all you needed to duplicate a game was a minimum of one disk and the cartridge to copy from, swashbuckling gamers made the most of Blockbuster's game rental service by spending evenings 'renting' the selection of new releases. To make matters worse for the Nintendo, the disks written by the Super Wild Card were readable by any home computer with a disk drive installed. On each disk was a single ROM file (or single file broken up over multiple disks), which could be quickly copied onto another blank disk for the next well-equipped pirate gamer.

With newer games starting to exceed the capacity of a single disk, loading often became cumbersome. On the rear side of the Super Wild Card was a solution – a parallel port. With the right software available, gamers could send ROM files via a PC through a parallel port cable, in which the cartridge copier would begin to write to memory and execute the game upon completion. This quicker method was then bettered once more with the arrival of the newer and more expensive Super Wild Card DX2, a unit which allowed its disk drive to be swapped for a CD-ROM drive.

No matter which way you looked at it, the countless features made the Super Wild Card a rather inviting, although dishonest device. That said, these devices deserve our thanks as they are the main reason why the entire Super Nintendo library has been archived for future generations to come, in what we more commonly know as ROMs.

...AND THE REST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SNES GAME CONVERTER
FX
FIRE
SUPER MULTITAP
SUPER NINTENDO
Nintendo
SCORE MASTER™
CompactFlash
SNES PowerPak
MARIO PAINT
SUPER NINTENDO
PAL VERSION
Nintendo
Super GAME BOY™
BRING GAME BOY GAMES TO THE BIG SCREEN
SUPER NINTENDO
PAL VERSION
GAME BOY™

01. Super Scope

■ In an attempt to out-do one another in the light gun department, both Sega and Nintendo believed that 'bigger was better'. Light guns soon became light bazookas, and adding to the absurdity, the Super Scope was fitted with a shoulder rest and scope – making gamers feel rather awkward in front of the television.

02. Blaze Import Adapter

■ With Europe caught up in an import frenzy, meticulous gamers needed to make sure their rig was equipped for the amplitude of treats from abroad. As US games were too wide for the PAL slot, import adapters extended the cartridge slot upwards allowing all shapes and sizes to be attached.

03. Hudson Soft's Super Multitap

■ Realising the limitations of their earlier *Bomberman* outing on the NES, Hudson Soft bundled a four player adapter with its 16-bit release *Super Bomberman*. Allowing up to four players to connect into one controller port, players began to blast their way through a collection of tangled control pads and angry competitors.

04. Super Advantage/ Score Master

■ In a time when the arcades still offered unmatchable graphics and gameplay, the nearest you could get to the coin-op experience at home was with an arcade stick. Following on from the NES Advantage arcade stick, Nintendo released an updated model for the SNES known as the Super Advantage.

05. Super Everdrive and SNES PowerPak

■ Seen as the more modern alternative to the Super Wild Card, the newly introduced memory card-compatible cartridges allowed gamers to access the entire library of Super Nintendo games without emulation. Eliminating the need to invest deeply for the rarer titles, these state-of-the-art devices come as the ultimate accessory for the SNES.

06. Super Nintendo Mouse

■ Arriving bundled with the novelty graphic software package, *Mario Paint*, the compatibility of the SNES Mouse was often overlooked. Capable of working with over 50 games, the SNES Mouse offered gamers much more precision for the likes of *Sim City* and *Lemmings 2: The Tribes*.

07. Super Game Boy

■ In 1994 a device capable of playing Game Boy games on a Television was introduced to the Super Nintendo. Not only did this device allow full-screen action on games intended for a small LCD display, but it also enhanced the visuals with a range of colour and decorative borders to select Game Boy cartridges.

The Collector's Guide

TOP GAMES TO PLAY

Super Mario Kart

■ Was there ever any doubt that this manic multiplayer racer would make the list? The near-perfect kart racer still remains the pinnacle of the series to this day, and has spawned an abundance of clones.

Starwing/Star Fox

■ Utilising the powerful Super FX chip *Star Fox* was arguably one of the most groundbreaking releases during the Super Nintendo's lifespan, proving 3D was easily done in 16-bit.

The Legend of Zelda: A Link To The Past

■ Having returned after a four-year hiatus, Link was back in his only outing on the Super Nintendo, proving there was still a plethora of life in the Hyrule legacy.

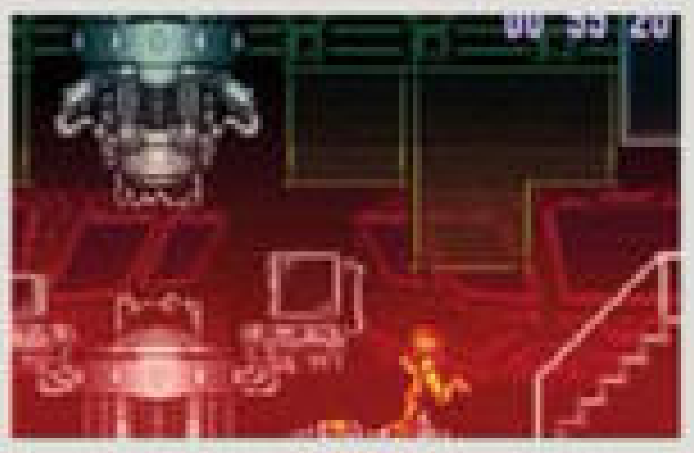
Super Mario World

■ Following on from the success of the NES hit release *Super Mario Bros 3*, Mario's next appearance on the Super Nintendo strengthened the very roots of the platform genre.

Donkey Kong Country

■ While offering a perfect blend of challenges and frustration, *Donkey Kong Country* should be in every collection purely for its sensational soundtrack and attention to detail.

PLAY THESE NEXT



Super Metroid

■ Eight years after Samus' first appearance, the third game in the *Metroid* series arrived on the SNES in 1994. It offered a doomed space colony to explore and the potential to get lost deep within Planet Zebes. The UK and German releases of *Super Metroid* also came in an oversized box bundled with a 72 page strategy guide.

Pilotwings

■ Falling into the lackluster flight simulation genre, *Pilotwings* was an unexpected hit arriving on launch day for the Super Nintendo. Taking control of some stunt-hungry aviators, your job is to carefully guide a selection of aircraft through hoops and loops. Easier said than done, *Pilotwings* is one of the hardest games to master.

Mega Man X

■ Like every other popular franchise on the NES, *Mega Man* was reborn on the Super Nintendo with a multitude of new abilities. Having outgrown his clunky robotic suit, the blue bomber was now able to dash and kick-jump walls. These tricks might of helped, but it was still an insanely difficult action-platformer.

Super Castlevania IV

■ With Dracula's revival dawning on Simon Belmont, the fourth edition in the hit series *Castlevania* arrived on the Super Nintendo just months after the console's release. Offering a range of graphical trickery, elaborate challenges and a groundbreaking soundtrack, *Super Castlevania IV* confidently built upon the iconic *Castlevania* name.

F-Zero

■ If there was ever a game to demonstrate the potential power and capability of a new system, *F-Zero* was it. Using the newly included feature of Mode 7 graphics on the Super Nintendo, the ultra-fast futuristic racer took faux-3D gaming to an all new level, both graphically and where gameplay is concerned.

TOP IMPORT GAMES

Tales Of Phantasia

■ While this 48 Mbit tale never ventured outside of Japan (before its Game Boy Advance port), fanatical SNES gamers compiled an accessible English translation patch for the Japanese ROM.

Earthbound

■ As RPGs continued to stick to their traditional roots, *Earthbound* broke the mould by creating a humorous, engaging adventure to which just about anybody could relate. Boing!

Final Fantasy III/VI

■ Often battling with *Chrono Trigger* for the title of 'Best SNES RPG', *Final Fantasy VI* (*III* in the US) pushed the genre's limits further than ever with its engrossing 60-plus hour expedition.

Super Mario RPG

■ While Europe was lucky enough to get the majority of Mario's adventures, the unusual combined effort from Squaresoft and Nintendo failed to arrive, much to many PAL gamers disappointment.

Battle Cross

■ While *Super Mario Kart* was dominating sales charts worldwide, this frantic Japanese exclusive was another worthy opponent for the title of 'Best Super Nintendo Multiplayer Racer'.

IMPORT THESE NEXT

Chrono Trigger

■ Squaresoft unquestionably defined the JRPG genre in the Nineties with their vast selection of epic adventures. *Chrono Trigger* was no different, presenting itself as one of the best releases of the decade. If the storyline wasn't enough to convince you, the visuals of *Dragon Quest* and *Dragon Ball Z* artist Akira Toriyama would.

Magical Pop'n

■ In what appears to be a light-hearted side-scrolling adventure, *Magical Pop'n* lures gamers in with its cute visuals shortly before unleashing an unforgettable challenge. After rising to cult hidden-gem status, this Japanese exclusive release developed by Polestar has seen endless competition for ownership on eBay.

The King of Demons (Majyuuou)

■ Often referred to as '*Castlevania* with a gun', *The King of Demons (Majyuuou)* is yet another addition to the list of hidden gems on the SNES. Featuring detailed landscapes and character sprites, the 1995 action game by KSS leaves many gamers wondering why it missed out on a PAL release.

DoReMi Fantasy: Milon's DokiDoki Adventure

■ The top contender for the most sickeningly cute visuals is surely this, Hudson Soft's platformer is the perfect remedy for those gloomy days. Having never left Japan, the highly desirable and enjoyable *DoReMi Fantasy* has seen an incredible rise in value over the last few years.

Ogre Battle: March of the Black Queen

■ Although many will argue *Final Fantasy Tactics* defined the turn-based tactical RPG, *Ogre Battle* has many gameplay hooks which Squaresoft's later release owes inspiration to. While commanding high price-tags today, Atlus recently re-released the game on the PSP.

The Collector's Guide

TOP RAREST PAL GAMES

X Zone

■ Hailing from Scandinavia, this incredibly rare Nordic exclusive was one of the few releases to make use of the under-loved and under-used Super Scope light gun (or should that be light bazooka?)

Cool World

■ Arriving on the Super Nintendo as a tie-in for the (highly forgettable) movie of the same name, the Spanish exclusive of *Cool World* flopped even harder than the disappointing feature film.

Whirlo

■ Continuing to prove Spain has plenty to offer the rarity hunters, this hard-to-find Namco platformer offers much more than rarity alone, as it's an adorable and addictive adventure.

Brawl Brothers

■ By the time Jaleco released this sequel to *Rival Turf*, gamers had grown tired of side-scrolling beat-'em-ups, leaving *Brawl Brothers* to be fought over in years to come.

Aero The Acrobat 2

■ Despite being a rather enjoyable follow-up to *Aero*'s last outing, *Aero The Acrobat 2* exists in numbers arguably smaller than the financial figures it commands. A rarity worth having, if only for future price.

GET THESE NEXT

Daze Before Christmas

■ Rumoured to have only been sold during Christmas of 1994, this seasonal platformer unsurprisingly remains to be one of the tougher Super Nintendo titles to locate. Given its limited holiday shelf-life and lack of re-playability, this festive release sold in very low numbers similar to the Mega Drive game of the same name.

Operation Logic Bomb

■ Arriving as a sequel to the Game Boy top-down shooter *Fortified Zone*, the German release of *Operation Logic Bomb* was a shallow game offering nothing but pretty visuals. Like many Jaleco releases for the SNES, Operation Logic Bomb comes with a rather impressive rarity as collectors attempt to locate the failed shooter.

Space Invaders

■ Despite being a runaway hit in countless 1978 arcades, the PAL Super Nintendo-port of *Space Invaders* was only released in limited quantities throughout Australia. While the game remains a timeless classic, Taito did very little with the arcade port to make it stand out against the wide range of engaging SNES games.

Super Chase HQ

■ Adding the prefix of 'Super' to the name of an older game wasn't always a promise of enhanced gameplay and visuals. Taito took their much-loved arcade hit *Chase HQ* and sculpted an unplayable mess featuring a new in-car view. With such poor review scores, *Super Chase HQ* remained on the shelves, becoming a future rarity.

Hungry Dinosaurs

■ There's always a handful of games on any console that just don't click with gamers, *Hungry Dinosaurs* being one of them. Arriving as a two-player hybrid of *Othello* and *Snake*, this incredibly dull stone age-themed release sold poorly following a very negative reception from both gaming publications and gamers themselves.

THE JEWEL IN THE CROWN

It's commonly thought that no English language version of Soul Blazer exists. But is that true? If you turn to an unlikely place, you might just be surprised…

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Soul Blazer
Free the Freilians. Make Deathtoll Pay.
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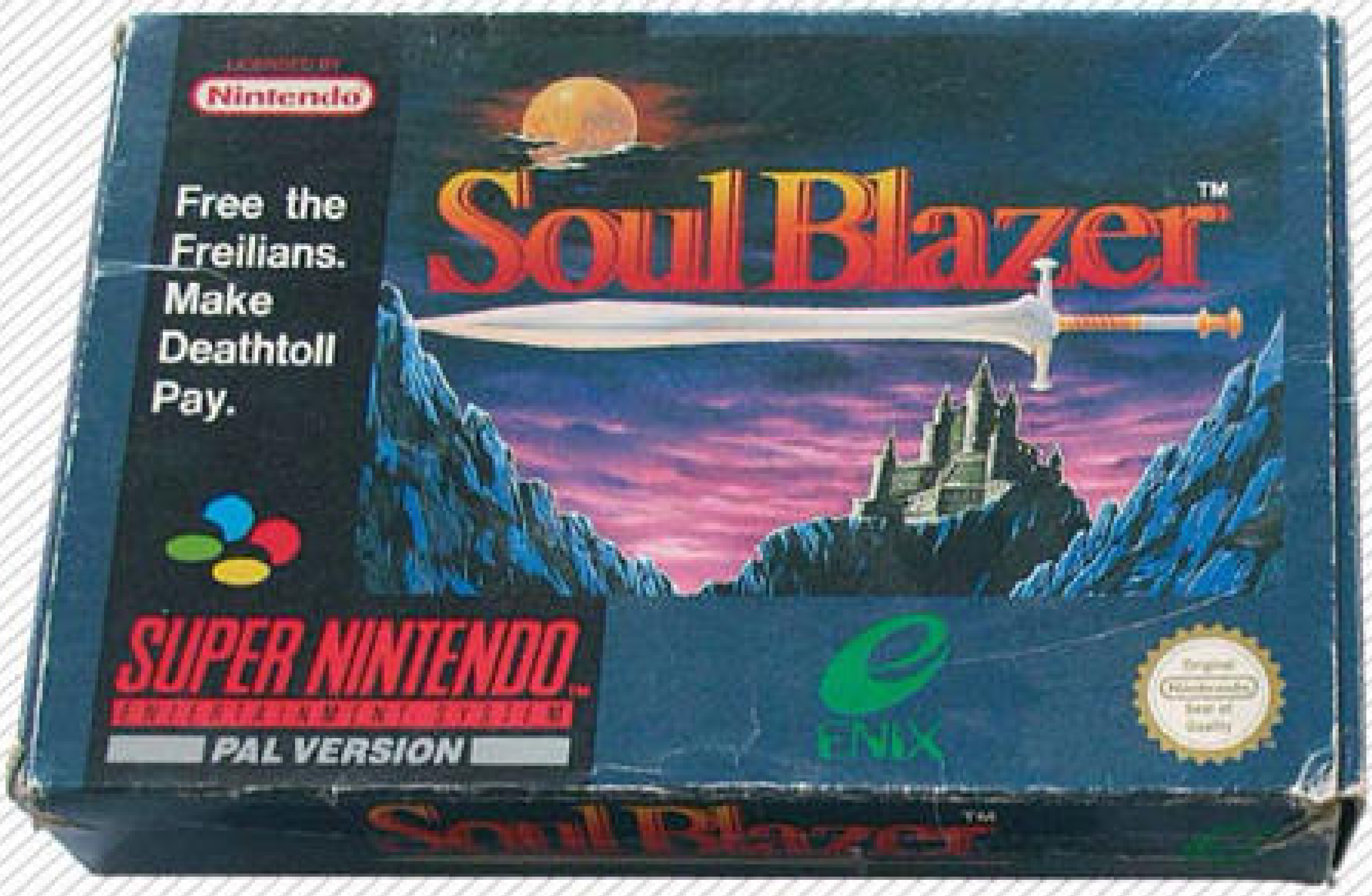
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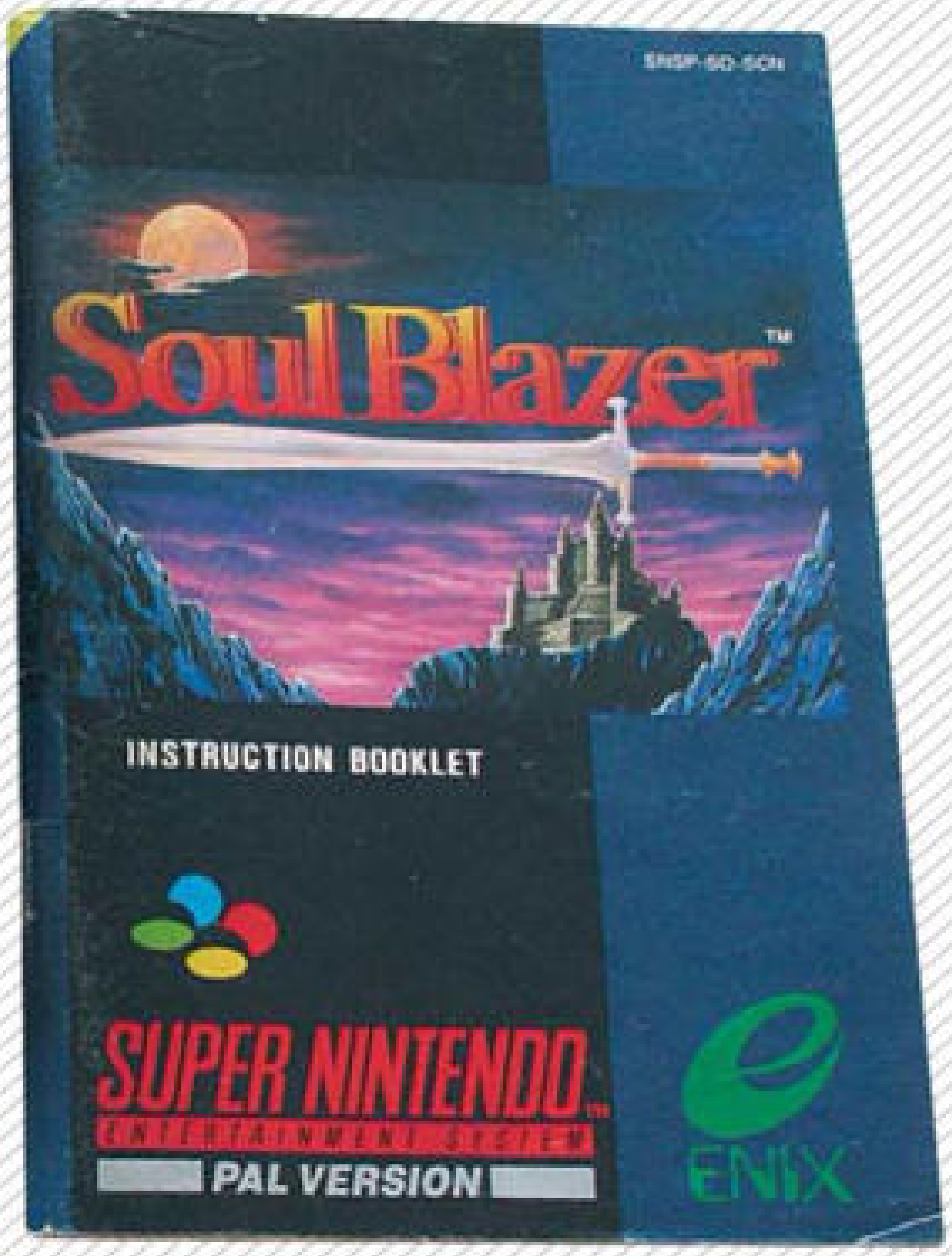
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INSTRUCTION BOOKLET
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ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM
PAL VERSION
ENIX

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PAL VERSION

Soul Blazer™

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INSTRUCTION BOOKLET
Soul Blazer

What makes it so special?

■ The most common versions of *Soul Blazer* hail from Europe and are in French or German, rendering it unplayable for the rest of the continent. Unknown to those who continue to import Enix's hit from abroad, an English language version of Soul Blazer has been available all these years, hidden deep within Scandinavia.

Why is it so expensive?

■ While the English language version is highly desirable, there's often another reason for the fluster of bids. The common European versions featured much plainer alternate artwork, surrounded by unattractive black borders. The harder to find game comes with a more attractive cover contained within stylish navy blue borders.

What makes it hard to find?

■ Acquiring the Scandinavian exclusive is no easy feat. Given the nearest to a Nordic eBay is Trader. The possibility of locating it, combined with finding a seller willing to accept offers from abroad, makes obtaining *Soul Blazer* a challenge. Those unwilling to embrace the struggle will have to wait for one to surface on eBay.

THE SUPER NINTENDO GAMES YOU NEED TO OWN

ACME Animation Factory ☐
ActRaiser ☐
ActRaiser 2 ☐
Addams Family Values ☐
The Addams Family ☐
The Addams Family: Pugsley's Scavenger Hunt ☐
The Adventures Of Batman & Robin ☐
The Adventures Of Mighty Max ☐
Aero The Acro-Bat ☐
Aero The Acro-Bat 2 ☐
Aguri Suzuki F-1 Super Driving ☐
Aladdin (Disney's) ☐
Alien Vs. Predator ☐
Alien 3 ☐
All-American Championship Football ☐
Animaniacs ☐
Another World ☐
Ardy Lightfoot ☐
Arkanoid ☐
Astérix ☐
Astérix & Obélix ☐
Axelay ☐
Batman Returns ☐
BattleClash ☐
Battletoads In Battlemaniacs ☐
Beauty & The Beast (Disney's) ☐
Beethoven: The Ultimate Canine Caper ☐
BioMetal ☐
BlackHawk ☐
The Blues Brothers ☐
Boxing Legends Of The Ring ☐
Brawl Brothers: Rival Turf! 2 ☐
Breath Of Fire II ☐
Bubsy II ☐
Cannon Fodder ☐
Captain Commando ☐
Casper ☐
Castlevania: Vampire's Kiss ☐
Chuck Rock ☐
Congo's Caper ☐
Cool Spot ☐
Cool World ☐
Cybernator ☐
Darius Twin ☐
Daze Before Christmas ☐
The Death And Return Of Superman ☐
Demon's Crest ☐

Cannon Fodder

Mega Man X

Desert Strike: Return To The Gulf ☐
Dino City ☐
Donald In Maui Mallard ☐
Donkey Kong Country ☐
Donkey Kong Country 2: Diddy's Kong Quest ☐
Donkey Kong Country 3: Dixie Kong's Double Trouble! ☐
Double Dragon V: The Shadow Falls ☐
Dragon Ball Z ☐
Dragon Ball Z: Hyper Dimension ☐
Dragon Ball Z: La Légende SAIEN ☐
Dragon Ball Z: Ultimate Menace ☐
Earth Defence Force ☐
Earthworm Jim ☐
Earthworm Jim 2 ☐
Equinox ☐
F-Zero ☐
Family Dog ☐
Fatal Fury 2 ☐
Final Fight ☐
Final Fight 2 ☐
Final Fight 3 ☐
The Firemen ☐
Flashback ☐
Foreman For Real ☐
Ghoul Patrol ☐
Gods ☐
Goof Troop (Disney's) ☐
GP-1 ☐
Hagane: The Final Conflict ☐
Harvest Moon ☐
The Humans ☐
Hungry Dinosaurs ☐
Hyper V-Ball ☐
HyperZone ☐
Illusion Of Time ☐
Incantation ☐
Indiana Jones' Greatest Adventures ☐
International Sensible Soccer: World Champions: Limited Edition Featuring World Cup Teams ☐
International Superstar Soccer Deluxe ☐
International Tennis Tour ☐
Jack Nicklaus Golf ☐
Jimmy Connors Pro Tennis Tour ☐
Joe & Mac: Caveman Ninja ☐
Joe & Mac ☐
Kid Klown In Crazy Chase ☐
Killer Instinct ☐
King Of Dragons ☐
Kirby's Dream Course ☐

Kirby's Fun Pack ☐
Kirby's Ghost Trap ☐
Knights Of The Round ☐
Legend ☐
The Legend Of The Mystical Ninja ☐
The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past ☐
Lemmings ☐
Lemmings 2: The Tribes ☐
Lethal Enforcers ☐
Loony Toons Basketball ☐
The Lost Vikings ☐
The Lost Vikings II: Norse By Norsewest ☐
Lufia ☐
Magic Sword ☐
The Magical Quest Starring Mickey Mouse ☐
Mario Paint ☐
Marko's Magic Football ☐
Marvel Super Heroes In War Of The Games ☐
Mega Man 7 ☐

Pilotwings

Mega Man X ☐
Mega Man X2 ☐
Mega Man X3 ☐
Metal Combat: Falcon's Revenge ☐
Mickey Mania ☐
Micro Machines 2: Turbo Tournament ☐
Mohawk & Headphone Jack ☐
Mortal Kombat II ☐
Mr Do! ☐
Ms Pac-Man ☐
NBA Jam: Tournament Edition ☐
Ninjawarriors: The New Generation ☐
On The Ball ☐
Operation: Logic Bomb ☐
Oscar ☐
Out To Lunch (Pierre Le Chef Is) ☐
Pac-Attack ☐
Pac-Man 2: The New Adventures ☐
Parodius ☐
Phalanx ☐
Pilotwings ☐
Pink Goes To Hollywood ☐
Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure ☐
Plok ☐
Pocky & Rocky ☐
Pocky & Rocky 2 ☐
Pop'n Twin Bee ☐
Pop'n Twin Bee: Rainbow Bell Adventures ☐
Power Drive ☐

EXTREMELY RARE Games that have less than a few dozen known copies available.

VERY RARE Very hard to come by. Expect to see only a couple of copies per year.

RARE You should be able to source these in a reasonable amount of time.

UNCOMMON You won't find them straight away, but you will after a search.

COMMON Always just a click away for the average collector.

VERY COMMON So common you'll find them in most bundles of games you buy.

- Power Rangers Zeo: Battle Racers ☐
- Prince Of Persia ☐
- Prince Of Persia 2 ☐
- Putty Squad ☐
- Puzzle Bobble: Bust-A-Move ☐
- R-Type III: The Third Lightning ☐
- Radical Rex ☐
- Realm ☐
- The Ren & Stimpy Show: Time Warp ☐
- The Ren & Stimpy Show: Veediots! ☐
- Rock 'N' Roll Racing ☐
- Sailormoon ☐
- Saturday Night Slammasters ☐
- Secret Of Evermore ☐
- Secret Of Mana ☐
- Sensible Soccer: European Champions ☐
- Shadowrun ☐
- Shanghai II: Dragon's Eye ☐
- Side Pocket ☐
- SimCity ☐
- Skyblazer ☐
- Smash Tennis ☐
- The Smurfs ☐
- The Smurfs: Travel The World ☐
- Soccer Kid ☐
- Sonic Blast Man ☐
- Soul Blazer ☐
- Space Invaders ☐
- Spanky's Quest ☐
- Sparkster ☐
- Spawn (Todd McFarlane's): The Video Game ☐
- Starwing ☐
- Street Fighter Alpha 2 ☐
- Street Fighter II ☐
- Street Fighter II Turbo ☐
- Street Racer ☐
- Striker ☐
- Stunt Race FX ☐
- Sunset Riders ☐
- Super Adventure Island ☐
- Super Adventure Island II ☐
- Super Aleste ☐
- Super BC Kid ☐
- Super Battleship: The Naval Combat Game ☐
- Super Bomberman ☐
- Super Bomberman 2 ☐
- Super Bomberman 3 ☐

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Super Punch-Out!!

- Super Castlevania IV ☐
- Super Chase HQ ☐
- Super Dany ☐
- Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts ☐
- Super Ice Hockey ☐
- Super Mario All-Stars ☐
- Super Mario All-Stars & Super Mario World ☐
- Super Mario Kart ☐
- Super Mario World ☐
- Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island ☐
- Super Metroid ☐
- Super Off Road ☐
- Super Pang ☐
- Super Probotector: Alien Rebels ☐
- Super Punch-Out!! ☐
- Super Putty ☐
- Super Smash TV ☐
- Super Star Wars ☐
- Super Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back ☐
- Super Star Wars: Return Of The Jedi ☐
- Super Street Fighter II ☐
- Super Strike Gunner ☐
- Super SWIV ☐
- Super Tennis ☐
- Super Turrican ☐
- Super Turrican 2 ☐
- Super Widget ☐
- Syvalion ☐
- Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles IV: Turtles In Time ☐
- Terranigma ☐
- Tetris & Dr. Mario ☐
- Tetris Attack ☐
- The Chaos Engine ☐
- The Great Circus Mystery Starring Mickey & Minnie ☐
- The Lion King (Disney's) ☐
- Thomas The Tank Engine & Friends ☐
- Time Trax ☐
- Tiny Toons Adventures: Buster Busts Loose! ☐
- TKO Super Championship Boxing ☐
- Top Gear ☐
- Top Gear 2 ☐
- Top Gear 3000 ☐
- Toys: Let The Toy Wars Begin! ☐
- True Golf Classics: Pebble Beach Golf Links ☐
- UN Squadron ☐
- Unirally ☐
- Venom/Spider-Man: Separation Anxiety ☐
- Wario's Woods ☐
- WarpSpeed ☐
- Whirlo ☐
- Whizz ☐
- Wild Guns ☐
- World Cup Striker ☐
- Worms ☐
- WWF Wrestlemania: The Arcade Game ☐
- X Zone ☐
- Yoshi's Cookie ☐
- Yoshi's Safari ☐
- Zero: The Kamikaze Squirrel ☐
- Zombies ☐

Collector Q&A

Bryan Paton has been collecting SNES games for years and has amassed an impressive collection

■ How long have you been collecting for?
I have been collecting Super Famicom games since about 1998. Obviously I had a SNES in the early Nineties, but with the high price and only having pocket money, it was hardly collecting. When I started work in 1996 I suddenly had cash flow. At first all my cash went on Japanese N64 releases but after a couple of years I returned to my roots and I began my Super Famicom collection in earnest.

■ What does the SNES offer over its peers?
At the time it was easily the most powerful mainstream home console and everything looked amazing. Arcade titles like *Street Fighter II* just blew me away, and many of the most popular franchises have had their best instalments on the SNES. I think the sheer number of quality tiles across all genres is its strength.

■ Why do you prefer collecting Japanese games to their PAL counterparts?
I swapped a PAL copy of *Pilotwings* for a SFC version of *Hook* and as soon as I saw the box and the design, you could say I was 'hooked' (sorry). The aesthetics of the Japanese designs are, in my opinion, miles ahead of the Western releases. The sheer number of titles available in Japan puts the PAL catalogue to shame. Back in the day, magazines such as *Super Play* influenced my love of Japanese gaming and Japan has such an interesting culture, I think gaming is just an extension of that interest.

■ What's the most expensive game you own?
Rendering Ranger R2. It goes for silly money now, I've seen copies exchange hands for £500. I was lucky and actually picked it up in 1998 on a trip for about £45 new.

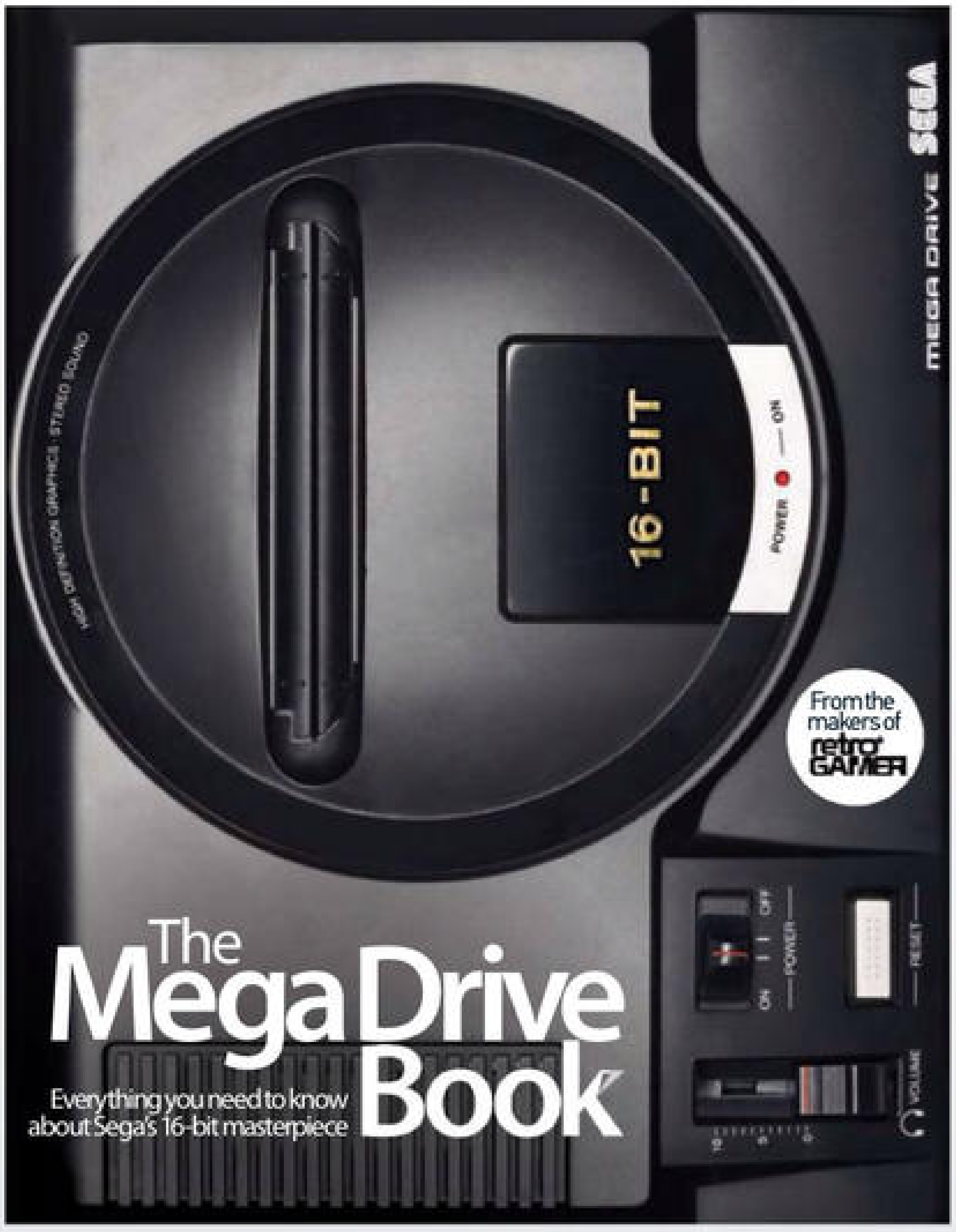
■ How important are mint boxes to you?
I wont even consider buying a game if it isn't complete and in good condition. Nintendo weren't thinking of the future when they decided cardboard was the way to go and it's getting harder to find games in top condition now, another reason the SNES commands such high prices.

■ What does your family/wife think of your hobby?
My wife is very understanding of my collection and has even been know to buy me SFC games for my birthday, not that I leave my wanted list lying around deliberately.

■ What advice would you give to other gamers interesting in collecting for the SNES?
Decide exactly what games and condition you want them in, and set a budget. Recently the SNES/SFC has become very expensive to collect. I was lucky and got in years ago, and gathered the majority of my 550 boxed games before the price boom. Know what you're getting into.

* Rarity guide courtesy of RETRO COLLECT Head to www.retrocollect.com for more information

Everything you need to know about Sega's 16-bit masterpiece & Nintendo's game changer


The Mega Drive Book

Everything you need to know about Sega's 16-bit masterpiece

From the makers of retro Gamer

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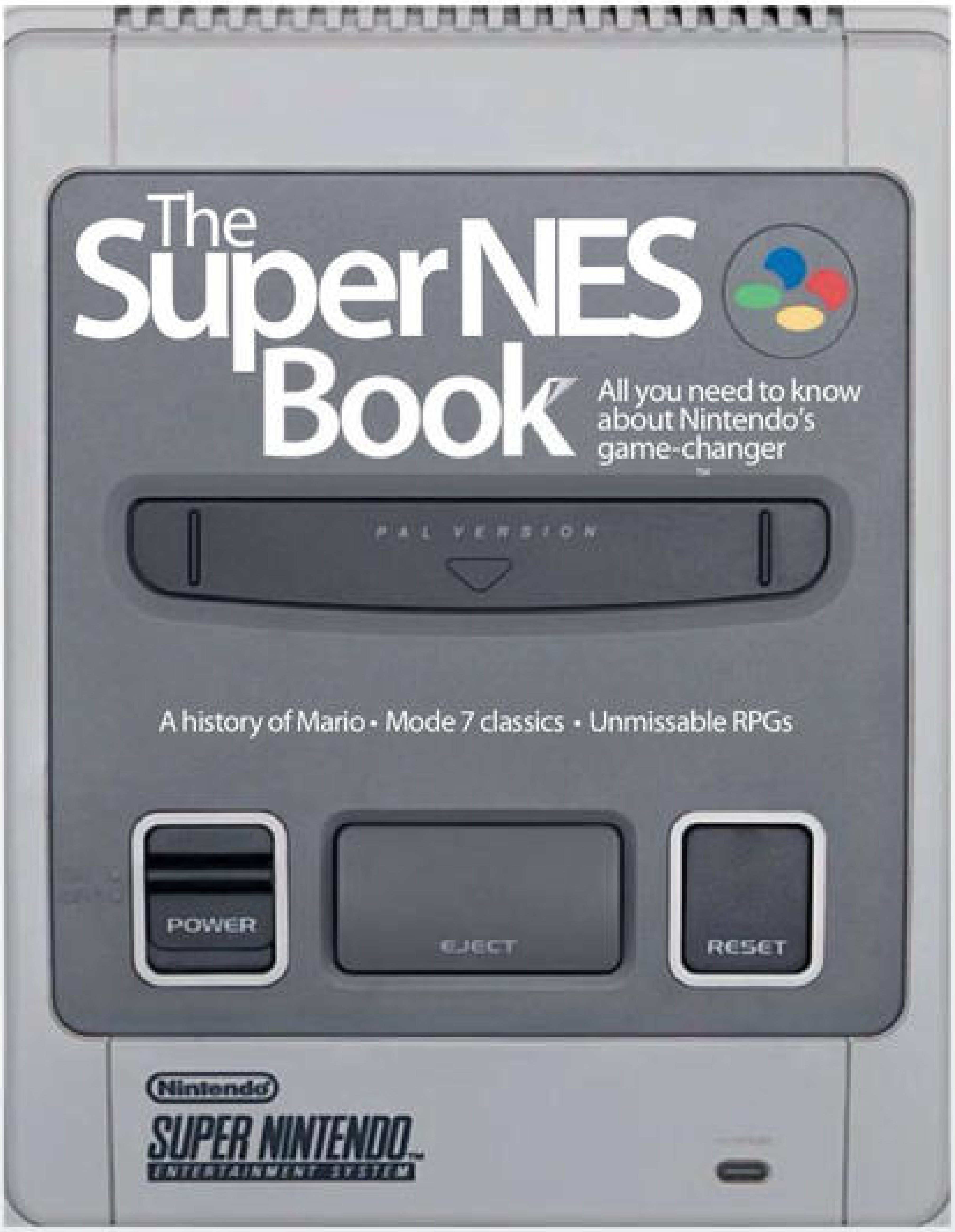
MEGA DRIVE
16-BIT
POWER
ON
HIGH DEFINITION GRAPHICS · STEREO SOUND
RESET
VOLUME


The Super NES Book

All you need to know about Nintendo's game-changer

A history of Mario • Mode 7 classics • Unmissable RPGs

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FIFA • Perfect Ten • Shinobi

A History Of Mario • Zelda
Star Wars • Unmissable RPG's

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